TAX INCREMENT FINANCING:
Public Communication and Collaboration

Spider McKnight | Six Pony Hitch

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Missoula is at a critical juncture in which rapidly escalating challenges call into question our values, culture, and priorities. The pandemic and resultant influx of newcomers have exacerbated significant societal issues including a growing wage gap; housing shortages and affordability; lack of equity and diversity; development priorities; political division and distrust of government, and climate change.

The Missoula Redevelopment Agency (MRA) and its primary tool of Tax Increment Financing (TIF) are central to the complex approach our city must take to preserve Missoula's quality of life. However, it is clear that fear of growth and widespread misinformation about both the MRA as well as TIF have generated significant community confusion and frustration, threatening to damage the crucial work of the MRA. Cognizant of these challenges, the MRA commissioned Six Pony Hitch to conduct an assessment and recommendations for the path forward. *Based on nearly 50 interviews, a review of public documents and communication tools, and secondary research, it is clear that the broad consensus is that the MRA's use of TIF is our community's most powerful tool for securing Missoula's future.* There is widespread belief that now is the time for the MRA to address our challenges head on and rebuild trust with the community by embracing the following four key actions:

1   CLEAR GOALS, PRIORITIES, AND METRICS

Provide a clear strategic plan, objectives, and metrics to demonstrate that MRA projects align with community priorities.

2   TRANSPARENT, ACCESSIBLE, AND COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATION

Prioritize communication: improve outreach, the website and other messaging outlets to provide data, budgets, and analysis in accessible terms.

3   AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Build capacity for engagement that demonstrates the MRA is hearing and integrating community voices at the beginning and throughout process and projects.

4   INCLUSIVE PROCESS AND GOVERNANCE

Address community perceptions that the MRA is an exclusive "club" with little to no diversity in its personnel, projects, and developers, not only of protected classes, but also of income, neighborhood representation, and political perspective.

Not Just an MRA Issue

While this report was commissioned to address the MRA, it is clear that these four actions stem from broader issues with the City and thus will be impossible for the MRA to tackle alone. As a result, recommendations for the City are included in order to maximize the effectiveness of TIF as a critical tool for achieving the City's goal of creating prosperity for all.

For example:

- Any strategic plan should be done in concert with the City and the community.

- Community engagement should be an ongoing and consistent endeavor. While the MRA could solely execute many of the recommendations in this plan, the City would be better served by investing in a shared, robust communications department.

- The MRA website's effectiveness is constrained by the limitations of the host platform of the City.

- Issues of equality, inclusiveness, and accessibility exist city-wide and need to be addressed consistently.

The Full Plan

Recommendations are categorized based on these four actions and presented in order so that each action sequentially builds toward a strong and lasting foundation. Tactics are divided into two levels based on urgency. Where possible, we have created specific examples, included in the Appendices. The section, *Community Recommendations on Process & Resources from Secondary Research*, includes ideas from interviewees as well as findings from our secondary research into successful models from other cities. We recognize that state laws vary, and some solutions may not be feasible, but hope that these ideas stimulate innovative thinking.

The research confirms that the MRA staff is already doing an incredible amount of work in the best interests of Missoula. By committing resources to building communication and demonstrating the existing alignment with community values, the MRA and the entire City will strengthen its relationship with the community and therefore its effectiveness.

TARGET
AUDIENCE

TARGET AUDIENCE

We recommend breaking the target audience into segments based on their current attitudes towards the MRA and its use of TIF. See the graphic on the following page. While it may be tempting to focus on those that are the most receptive to the MRA, the hard work of engaging with those who are hardest to reach will pay off with greater community trust and support.

This report attempts to give voice to each segment of the target audience and to recommend actions that will improve relations between the MRA and each audience segment. All of these groups are represented in the *Interviews* sections of this document and recommendations from every group are also included in the *Recommendations* and *Community Recommendations on Process & Resources from Secondary Research* sections.

HARDEST TO REACH	Against the MRA's use of TIF for political reasons. Not interested in learning more.	▶ *Hardest to reach. Want systems reform.*
	Never heard of the MRA and/or TIF. Don't think has anything to do with them. Not interested in learning more.	▶ *Hard to reach. Don't have time or energy to care about things that don't concern them.*
DIFFICULT TO REACH	Have negative feelings about the MRA's use of TIF. When presented with facts, don't believe them.	▶ *Difficult to reach. Need lots of proof and some system reform.*
EASIER TO REACH	Leaning negative in feelings about the MRA's use of TIF. When presented with facts, open to learning more.	▶ *Open to learning more about the MRA's use of TIF.*
	Have neutral to negative feelings about the MRA's use of TIF. When presented with facts, easily change their mind.	▶ *Open to learning more about the MRA's use of TIF.*
	Never heard of the MRA and/or TIF. Don't care about it until they realize it concerns them. Then are interested in learning more.	▶ *Are unaware of the MRA.*
	Like the MRA's use of TIF, but don't fully understand it.	▶ *Want to be more informed.*
EASIEST TO REACH	Love the MRA's use of TIF and want to share with others.	▶ *Want to help spread the word.*

METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY

This report presents results of interviews conducted on behalf of the MRA with key contacts in Missoula. Six Pony Hitch developed a list of questions for each interview based on the interviewee's role in the Missoula community and relationship to the MRA and its use of TIF. Each interview was recorded and transcribed. Participants were informed that recordings and transcriptions would not be shared. All quotations in this document will remain unattributed to maintain this promise of confidentiality.

Interview Subjects

Six Pony Hitch interviewed all members of the MRA staff and Board, as well as all members of City Council and a range of community members representing a wide array of viewpoints.

Interviewees were selected using the snowball method where research participants are asked to identify other potential subjects. Six Pony Hitch reached out to vocal supporters and critics as well as known community organizers for interviews and then asked those interviewees to direct us to other potential interviewees. Due to time and budget constraints, these interviews represent a small portion of the Missoula community by demographic but, hopefully, represent a wide-range of viewpoints about the MRA's use of TIF.

Please note that there were numerous people publicly opposed to the MRA's use of TIF who were contacted for interviews and did not respond or did not agree to participate.

Six Pony Hitch interviewed the following people, referred to in this document as "interviewees":

Staff

- Ellen Buchanan, *Director*

- Chris Behan, *Assistant Director*

- Jilayne Dunn, *Business/Project Manager*

- Tod Gass, *Project Manager*

- Annette Marchesseault, *Project Manager/Redevelopment Specialist*

- Lesley Pugh, *Administrative Assistant*

Board

- Karl J. Englund (Chair)

- Natasha Prinzing Jones

- Ruth Reineking

- Nancy K. Moe

- Melanie Brock

City Council

- Bryan Von Lossberg, *Ward 1*

- Heidi West, *Ward 1*

- Jordan Hess, *Ward 2*

- Mirtha Becerra, *Ward 2*

- Heather Harp, *Ward 3*

- Gwen Jones, *Ward 3*

- Amber Sherril, *Ward 4*

- Jesse Ramos, *Ward 4*

- Stacie Anderson, *Ward 5*

- John Contos, *Ward 5*

- Julie Merritt, *Ward 6*

- Sandra Vasecka, *Ward 6*

Community

- Mayor John Engen, *City of Missoula*

- Grant Kier, *President and CEO Missoula Economic Partnership*

- Dan Kemmis, *Former MRA board member, Former Mayor Missoula, Author*

- Mark Bellon, *Project Executive, IMEG Corp. (Formerly Territorial Landworks)*

- Linda McCarthy, *Executive Director, Downtown Missoula Partnership*

- Andrea Davis, *Executive Director, Homeword*

- Barb Rigg, *SVP, Commercial Loan Manager, First Security Bank*

- Dan Cederberg, *Attorney, Cederberg Law Offices*

- Casey Dunning, *Director, Missoula Interfaith Collaborative*

- Dale Bickell, *Chief Administrative Officer, City of Missoula*

- Chris Anderson, *President and Principle in Charge DJ&A*

- D'Shane Barnett, *Former Executive Director of All Nation's Health Center, incoming Director of Missoula City-County Health Department*

- Anonymous, *Small Business owner, Real estate professional opposed to the MRA's use of TIF*

- Anonymous, *Community member in support of the MRA and TIF*

- Anonymous, *Community member, self-identified Libertarian, opposed to the MRA's use of TIF*

- Anonymous, *Community member, agnostic about TIF*

- Josh Decker, *North Side-West Side CREW and co-chair Western Montana Democratic Socialists of America*

- Sarah Kester, *Community Member, Author "Owning the Future: Investing in our Neighborhoods and the Residents*

- Colin Woodrow, *Neighborhoods Coordinator, City of Missoula*

- Dawn McGee, *CEO, Goodworks Ventures, President High Stakes Foundation*

- Bryan Di Salvatore, *Author, community member*

- Jennie Vader, *Community member and organizer*

- Brittany Palmer, *Community member and organizer*

- Bill Henry, *Trust Montana*

- Daniel Carlino, *Ward 3 City Council Candidate*

- Larry Simkins, *President, Washington Corporations*

Notes on the Interviews

Six Pony Hitch does not attribute quotations or provide full transcripts of interviews to respect the privacy and confidentiality of those who have been interviewed, as private information is sometimes discussed in order to give the interviewer context about a subject. This document is therefore a mix of direct quotations, summarized content (when consistent by all or most clients), and paraphrased anonymous information. All interviewees were extremely helpful and forthcoming. No interviewees were giving any remuneration.

Additional Research

In addition to the interviews, Six Pony Hitch conducted a complete audit of the MRA's public documents including all website copy, agendas and minutes from past Board meetings, financial audits (including descriptions of past projects), marketing materials, brochures, TIF process documents, and the list of major projects to date.

We also conducted secondary research and studied best practices and models from other communities around the country that have been using TIF. At the conclusion of our interviews, we researched suggested ideas and models from interviewees and included them in this report as resources. A bibliography of our studies is included in the appendices.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEWS

Six Pony Hitch conducted nearly 50 interviews representing a full spectrum of perceptions of the MRA, including those with a demonstrated record of engagement (both supporters and detractors), community leaders, and those with vested interest in Missoula's future. The following paragraphs summarize critical feedback from the MRA Staff and Board, City Council members, and Community members. Please note that the full summaries of the interviews can be found in Appendix "Full Staff Summary" on page 174, "Full Board Summary" on page 180, "Full City Council Summary" on page 189, "Full Community Summary" on page 222. These summaries provide expanded detail, including anonymous quotes. While these segments are long, they provide invaluable context in determining next steps.

MRA Staff and Board

Key takeaways: The MRA staff and Board believe that their dedicated work to align TIF funding with community priorities is insufficiently communicated to the public, and would welcome the development of a robust communications plan, with comprehensive messaging including a new website, social media, op-eds, and in-person outreach.

The MRA staff and Board are a dedicated and united team. The staff works hard to vet all projects, forwarding to the Board only those that they are confident will be approved in line with community priorities. Both staff and Board members believe that the community does not recognize this level of assessment and due diligence and are frustrated by the perception of the MRA in the community and that TIF has become a "flashpoint." Staff and Board members agree that they have been so "focused on getting the work done" that they have "not really been thinking about communicating that work to the public."

The staff and Board believe there is significant misinformation being spread that undermines their work. In response to the complaints about transparency, they are trying to upload all documents onto the website, as well as to digitize documentation on historical projects so that all past information is also accessible. However, they do not have the capacity, the systems, or the knowledge to be proactive with communication. Staff members are eager for communication to help them get more information out to the public.

Board members say that communication is crucial for the MRA. As one Board member put it, "everyone that supports MRA (staff, Board, City Council, housing organizations, etc.) needs to have a mindset switch so that knowledge is never assumed and that there is always the opportunity to educate." They also point out that many times "engineers and technical experts instead of communications experts" are the people

engaging with the public. They also want to see the MRA doing outreach to the entire community, not just residents of Urban Renewal Districts (URDs).

While staff and Board members believe there to be a "public and open engagement process" at the creation of an URD, they state there is "no current process for additional engagement." Despite efforts to make Board meetings easy to attend, they are sparsely attended. Board members believe that proactive education is critical. They want to hear from community members and are open to ways to improve the process. "In the moment when there's controversy," says one Board member, "you can't orient people very well." The MRA needs to be "more proactive in educating so that the community has a base level of knowledge to decide whether or not they support the investment of public funds on a particular project."

The Board follows very clear criteria in referencing City plans to support community goals, and hopes that better communication will help the public to understand these efforts. They fully appreciate the need for improved communications including cohesive direction, a new website, clearer messaging, utilization of case studies and data, signage, PowerPoint presentations, and social media. They are ready and eager to help via op-eds, presentations, press interviews, even house parties, and are looking for a coordinated effort.

City Council

Key takeaways: To clarify the impact of TIF to the greater community good and demonstrate staff and Board commitment within the scope of the law, the MRA needs to address challenges of clear priorities and metrics, oversight, communication, and Board diversity. At the same time, there are refuted concerns by a minority of Council members and the public as to the impact on tax base and individual Districts.

Many City Council members note that MRA and TIF issues are among the most challenging issues faced by our community, complicated by the level of detail as well as the amount of misinformation. There is consensus that the staff and Board are doing great work, follow Montana law, and intensely scrutinize every project proposal.

Many agree that there is a need for clear priorities and metrics driven by the community to better support issues of communication and accountability the public is clamoring for. While the MRA supports City goals and plans, "it's not always clear what they are supporting." Given the number of projects, and the overlap, there needs to be a transparent way to prioritize projects. As one Council member noted, a shared agreement of what we're trying to do with specific Districts would go a long way toward garnering community support while also ensuring that developers understand their commitment given the use of public funds.

Many members question the autonomy of the Board, noting that only two boards in Missoula – MRA and Parking – are empowered to approve projects without a Council vote. Given that the Board is appointed by the Mayor, this leads to the perception that a small group of people are making decisions that affect the entire City with minimal oversight. One way to help dispel this perception would be to create more engagement with the Council. Currently, the only MRA projects that come before Council are the larger projects that require bonds – which are also the high-profile, more controversial projects that are all "pretty much a done deal" by the time they get to Council, forcing them into the awkward position of agreeing to the projects or risk unraveling the MRA staff and Board's hard work. Providing more advance information and a formal or informal process for checking in earlier on projects would be advantageous to all. Some suggested that the Chair of the Council's Finance and Administration Committee could serve as an ex-officio MRA Board member and report back to Council members.

They also believe that the Board needs to be more diverse, while acknowledging that the MRA Board requires specific technical knowledge and should not be elected.

At the same time, some say the issue goes deeper to a fundamental unwillingness by some segment of the public to try to understand the processes and functions of government, NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard), and the fact that some people can't see the benefit of a project to the community if it doesn't benefit them directly.

Not all City Council members are behind the MRA's use of TIF. All agree that it has done amazing things for Missoula, but some claim that it isn't needed anymore and is causing more harm than good. Critics say that Missoula is booming, and that the blight that TIF is designed to address is no longer an issue. They say that the Mayor is taking advantage of TIF funds to accomplish projects and that by bonding projects and extending the life of Districts that would otherwise sunset, the MRA is shifting the risk away from developers and onto citizens.

These members also say that increased development creates growth, which creates a need for City services but, because new tax money derived from development is diverted into TIF, there is no additional revenue in the general fund to pay for the increased services. This strains the general operational budget and forces the City to raise taxes to cover the new expenses. All of that adds up to residents in other districts paying for the additional burden. The MRA should not keep any money in a TIF District "beyond what is necessary to service debt" and that Districts should sunset after a maximum of 15 years. In terms of issues of communication, critics believe that the MRA is intentionally using the intricacies of TIF to obscure what is really happening and to avoid getting public agreement on projects.

Most Council members state that the facts refute these claims, and that the critics are using TIF as a "wedge issue" to gain political capital. Yes, there are challenges with communication, but it is not intentional. The MRA and all involved are actively looking for ways to make the process clearer and more

accessible. TIF does not make taxpayers in other districts solely responsible for City services. While they admit that the use of TIF could cause some small increase in taxes, the substantial benefits that come to our communities would not exist if they had to be paid for out of the general fund. They point out that the MRA uses TIF to ensure that developments include benefits to the public that would not happen otherwise. As one Council member noted, "The idea is that you're investing for the future of our town and, ultimately, the payback's going to be bigger…when you have that level of investment in an area, it has a domino effect all around."

The real issue, say many Council members, is a need for tax reform in general. There are a lot of "little pieces, which have caused some rise in taxes. But the majority of it is the change in our tax base and the change in legislative laws has pared back all sorts of other taxes. And the fact that we did not have a diverse tax base. At this point, it's pretty much residential that's really the workhorse now."

It is unfortunate that they must extend the lifespan of URDs, but the lifespan of the District needs to accommodate for the time it takes to "prime the pump," by increasing the tax base with private developments so that the MRA can fund more public projects like housing, infrastructure, and parks. To the point about not keeping too much money away from the general fund, some Council members say that they are considering reforms like putting a cap on how much money stays in the fund. But that restricts the ability of the MRA to capitalize on unforeseen opportunities that can make a difference in community needs like housing.

Council members all agree that communication is a big issue, but that it does not lie solely with the MRA. A mindset shift needs to occur not only with everyone involved in the MRA, but also everyone at the City. Right now, the City simply does not have the capacity to communicate effectively. "One person can't do it all," and the current person works specifically for the Mayor's office. There needs to be a full communications department, "because the problem goes way beyond TIF."

> *The City has generally approached communicating from a scarcity mindset. Communicating takes time, energy, money. They would rather do programmatic stuff than increase communication capacity.*

A City communications department needs to include dedicated engagement personnel. "People do not feel heard. They need to feel included in the process." Right now, all communication from the City seems to be "one-way," where the City sends out information but does not try to have any real dialogue with the

community. The City, "needs to do a better job of creating feedback loops so that the community feels their input is valued and proactively solicited."

Council members also point out that community input is only sought at the beginning of a URD but that, over time, priorities for the community change and there is no mechanism to accommodate for that. One suggestion was to have a regular open house in each District every few years where the MRA could present an update and listen to what the community would like to see accomplished moving forward. Again, however, there needs to be a city-wide effort to reach out to all members of the community, not just through forums and neighborhood councils. A real dedication to community engagement involves both a shift in thinking and priorities. There is no quick fix for community engagement, but it is crucial that the MRA and the City start listening.

Community

Key takeaways: There were significant areas of agreement in terms of demonstrated successes; the lack of clear goals and priorities; challenges of oversight, communication, engagement, and need for greater diversity; and that City and MRA leadership should view discontent as an opportunity to strengthen the process and build trust with the community. However, there are strident differences of opinion regarding such critical areas as growth, access, equity, influence, and community culture.

Community interviewees agreed that the MRA has done great work, referencing Caras Park and the revitalization of Downtown Missoula as examples in which TIF has successfully addressed blight and created much needed economic development. They also agree that the MRA must take a leadership role in addressing growth and resultant challenges that have been exacerbated in the wake of the pandemic, as TIF "has proven to be a very good and powerful tool."

However, there were multiple concerns echoing those expressed by members of the City Council. All agree that it is important that the MRA and the City see discontent as an opportunity to improve the process and build trust with the community. City leadership should be "asking hard questions about TIF and looking seriously at criticism."

Interviewees largely believe that MRA projects align with community goals, but that this alignment is not always apparent. Clear priorities and objectives would help improve communication, transparency, and trust, and, as a result, "there might be less misinformation." Interviewees want goals such as affordable housing, sustainability, and diversity to not only be clear, but public. As one person noted, "They need a dashboard. Right on the front of the website. They need to show "these are our goals and this is how we're doing in terms of meeting them". If they fund a project that doesn't meet community goals, then everyone will know it."

There was a significant emphasis on one such priority being diversity. The demonstrated lack of diversity in the staff, Board, and developers on a number of levels – economic and geographic as well as race and other protected classes – contributes to citizens feeling "very distanced from the decision making." Many interviewees asked about prioritizing local businesses over corporations and giving preferences to minority owned and disadvantaged businesses as ways to bring diversity to the work. As one interviewee noted, "The only people that I've ever heard talk about TIF are well-connected white people."

Interviewees acknowledge that the City is working with LEARN Missoula to address some of the systemic racism and inequities in our government – but that's not enough. The MRA and the City need to stop claiming that there "just aren't any" opportunities to bring in BIPOC and LGBTQI developers and to fund projects by and for these communities.

> *MRA needs to be aligning actions to values. If they really are going place inclusion – or, now we're moving to gender justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion – if they're really going to say we value that and we want to have equity and opportunity for our BIPOC community, LGBTQ, etc., their actions need to meet that value. They can't just sit back and say, "Oh, we don't know. We don't know of anyone. So, we're going to call it a day." If that's really their value, they will change the work that they do to meet that value. Or just be honest, and be like, "actually that's not really our value." And then at least we know what to expect.*

The need for greater oversight again referenced Board governance:

> *The only boards that are not advisory to City Council are MRA and Parking. This means that they get to approve projects without Council and make personnel decisions. City Council has to approve every police car that is purchased. It is a mistake that the MRA Board does not operate like the rest. The argument that MRA makes is that it would slow things down and that they wouldn't be able to do the work that they do if they had to run everything by Council, but other departments do it every day.*

Some interviewees question who is making decisions about funding. These respondents also questioned a lack of consistency in projects, and frustrations with the extension of URDs.

The issue of growth is the core of the TIF controversy. All interviewees agree that growth is putting tremendous pressure on Missoula's housing market, leading to critical challenges with housing costs and availability, evictions, increased property taxes, and growing wealth inequality. One interviewee concerned about growth framed the issue in terms of our community's capacity for "self-determination" and that "the social and economic diversity" that make our community strong is being challenged. Other interviewees

welcome growth, seeing it as a positive necessity for our community. To welcome rather than prevent outsiders coming to Missoula, we need to embrace change while planning for it in "meaningful ways."

There is a perception that the MRA only wants to fund big projects that create a substantial growth of the tax base. Instead of corporations, many interviewees want to see support for small businesses that contribute to neighborhoods. There is also the perception of TIF as a "gentrification machine," that is ultimately pricing people out of their neighborhoods. In a community where people are struggling to pay rent, people are angry that money is going to "subsidize" corporations such as Starbucks, Stockman's Bank, and Southgate Mall. Even interviewees that see TIF as a potential budget tool that could do good for the community are frustrated by what they see as a limited access to the MRA and TIF.

> *There's a perception from community members that if you have access to TIF funding, you've either been thrown a bone as a non-profit developer or you are part of the in crowd and you have access to power. You golf at the right golf club, you eat dinner at the right dinner club. You've talked to the right people…. whatever those pathways to power are….as much as perception is reality, the perception is that in order to have access to TIF, you need to dress the right way and have the right business card and have handed it to the right people in the last 10 years….Not a lot of people feel like they're in that club.*

These perceptions are frustrating for interviewees who see the MRA's use of TIF as a crucial tool to address growth, preserve our culture, and address inequality. Money never goes directly to developers, or businesses.

> *There's a lot of criticism in Missoula because it looks like MRA is just giving City taxpayer dollars to Starbucks, and that's the narrative, right? Or they're giving tax dollars to the wealthy Bozeman developer. They don't understand that it can't go directly to developers. It can only be used for specific items within that project. They don't understand that TIF can leverage a better project, a better design, a higher density development.*

There is also significant controversy over the role of and relations with developers. Some reference positive examples of collaboration between developers, the City/MRA and the community, such as the Ravara development. However, generally speaking, developers, bankers, and others involved with the development process state that public perception about them is incorrect. They note that a lack of affordable land for development, a nationwide shortage of building materials, challenges with the City planning department, and steep impact fees in Missoula complicate development. They also note that most developers are not big money people from out-of-state, but are local contractors taking big risks

and not making huge profits. Given the challenges and expenses, TIF takes "just enough risk" out of their projects to make development happen in Missoula, especially in the areas that need it most.

Other interviewees say that the MRA and the City go too far in trying to help developers.

> *This song that developers sing that is like, it is so hard to make money being a developer. You know, those are threats…. a developer says, "well, you already have too many regulations." They're saying that in every community that they move into to develop because they want to have less regulations in every community. If there's almost no regulations, they're going to rail against those small little picky regulations that already exist. The intangibles of our community are too valuable for us to just give away to developers that say, "well, you're really making it risky up there."*

They say that the City should "hold the bar higher" for developers and "pursue the right kind of development."

> *Let's look for projects that we like and engage those developers directly as opposed to waiting for them to come to us—court developers of projects that have shown community betterment, that have wage guarantees associated with them, supporting projects like community centers or shared space or community ownership models, for development.*

Others say the City should just get out of the way. Government just shouldn't be involved in development and that TIF is no longer necessary.

> *We need to just let development happen on its own. There is no place for the government in this process. We don't need to be spending our taxpayer money to incentivize development that is just going to happen anyway.*

In contrast, some interviewees believe the City should be more involved. For example, the City should eliminate public-private partnerships and own housing themselves. While others strongly disagree with this approach, they do suggest that the City do more work with partner organizations.

Some recognize that the MRA is already working with non-profit and other partners on the issue of housing. TIF expands public infrastructure, helping community developers create good housing with access to outdoor spaces. It also allows the City to bring elements to community projects that would never happen with private developers, such as land banking and industrial clean-up. TIF also allows the

City and other groups to leverage grant funding to make investments in community even bigger. It's also understood that TIF is just one piece of the housing crisis puzzle, and that the City must pursue other options.

Some interviewees believe that TIF should also be a tool to address income inequality.

> *I would forbid Tax Increment Financing from being used on projects that were not going to perpetually pay a living wage....every employee from the people that build the project to the end line barista that is working in the lobby of the project need to be paid a living wage...*

Then there is the issue of taxes. Critics say that TIF "starves our general fund" by diverting money from the general fund to pay for all the new growth that TIF is supporting and that "taxpayers in other districts are paying for the surge in service demand." Most interviewees, however, say that while TIF does not directly raise taxes, it raises property values. While this is a gain for many, people on fixed incomes are struggling.

Many say that to argue on technicalities is counterproductive. TIF does "marginally" lead to an increase in taxes and the MRA should say so. At the same time, the benefits are exponential, and the MRA should do a better job of pointing those out. The Mayor has stated that without the growth from TIF, he would have to look for other ways to fund City services, and that the City could not build the same infrastructure with the existing tax base. Most interviewees agree with the Mayor, seeing that crucial City infrastructure that is an "investment" in Missoula's future would not happen without the MRA's use of TIF.

Following a consistent theme, many interviewees state that a lack of communication, engagement, and clear messaging are to blame for misperceptions. Interviewees want basic information about how TIF works in a way that is easily understood and tied to community goals. Even some skeptics agree that the MRA needs to be better about communication that will "acknowledge where the money goes." Some noted that it is hard to trust the MRA when even basic information is not available for the public. For example, some interviewees say that TIF does not give budgetary context for investments. They want to know what percentage of the MRA's budget is going to housing and other community projects. More transparency will help to build community trust.

Almost everyone who was interviewed complained about the MRA's website, asking that it be easier to navigate to provide real information and data. There were numerous suggestions for communication elements, including simple videos, case studies, a more proactive approach to the press, and a presence on social media. Many suggested that the MRA needs a full-time marketing/communications person, or better yet, that the City create a full communications department that also supported the MRA.

There is a perception that the MRA and the City feel like they are in tune with what the community wants and needs so there is no need to conduct deep community engagement. Any such engagement is therefore perfunctory, exclusionary and relies too heavily on the neighborhood councils, which are not set up to be doing public engagement. For the MRA, community engagement currently occurs at the beginning of the creation of a District and is usually conducted by consultants and engineers. This system doesn't foster genuine community engagement and input.

Developers claim that community engagement is important but can slow down the process, which then raises costs. They say that when they do ask for engagement, they don't get clear guidance because there are so many differing opinions. They also point out the difficulties of having to juggle various community interests with the realities of building and paying for projects.

Most interviewees also believe that the MRA and its use of TIF need to be considered within the context of the broader political discontent evidenced both nationally and locally. As one interviewee noted:

> *The anxiety on the far left is that this is only benefiting rich people. The anxiety on the far right is that this is just another way that governments are taking more control than they should and spending more money than they should.*

Another interviewee commented:

> *The community issues with TIF started on the far right and far left but have crept towards the middle. There has been so much misinformation put out there. And now, with our housing crisis, our wage crisis, and this huge influx of new people into our community, people are on edge. MRA needs to get a handle on this.*

Most interviewees note that not all the issues are specific to the MRA's use of TIF, and that much of the animosity is coming from a larger discontent with government in general. One bad experience with any government entity leads to being disgruntled with governance generally. While interviewees chalk this up to our political climate, most believe that customer service in City departments could be improved. Planning and development were particularly noted for their "inefficiencies," which the City has already moved to address.

More than anything, interviewees want the MRA and elected officials to listen to community concerns.

RECOMMENDATIONS

CLEAR GOALS, PRIORITIES & METRICS

The MRA follows clear goals set by the City. Staff and Board members point to the numerous City, District, and neighborhood plans that each of their approved project addresses. And supporters point to all the public process that happens in creating those plans:

> *MRA definitely invests in things that align with community goals. We hear and understand that info from a lot of public meetings including neighborhood council meetings and City Council meetings. Public engagement comes through these avenues which informs the Downtown Master Plan, transportation plans, growth plans and housing plans. TIF aligns with all of these plans.*

However, most people, including supportive City Council members have a hard time seeing the connection. If the MRA's goal is to effectively help drive execution of the City's larger goals, then MRA and the City need to set a small number of strategic priorities and communicate them both internally and externally to help eliminate misinformation.

> *Having clear goals and objectives for each District would really help with communication. If we could show how each project meets the City's goals, there might be less misinformation. For example, deconstruction was important for this project because of the City's Zero Waste initiative which came from a desire from the community. Without TIF funds on this project, the developer would have taken materials to the landfill.*
>
> *I really like the idea of having overall priorities and a stated goal for each District so that they know when they've met that goal. And it's not just a moving target. We can't move the goalpost. I think clear goals would help a lot of detractors and others that would like to know what the end game is and see it happen.*

MRA communication needs to be firmly rooted in strategy and goals. The community needs to understand what the MRA is trying to achieve and how each project is building towards the larger community goals. Therefore, the first step is to create a clear strategic plan.

Prosper Portland is a great model for the MRA as that organization faces similar issues of growth and housing affordability issues as well as the need to prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion. Prosper Portland's strategic plan can be reviewed at:

http://prosperportland.us/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/PDC-Strategic-Plan.pdf

When writing the plan, also consider the MIT Sloan Management Review's suggested six steps for communicating strategic priorities effectively (Sull, Turconi, and Sull):

1   LIMIT STRATEGIC PRIORITIES TO A HANDFUL

Keeping the list small will help the public remember them. It will also signal what matters most to the MRA. This doesn't mean that the MRA can never take projects that don't fit into this handful of priorities. Many interviewers explained the need for flexibility for unforeseen opportunities. In those cases, however, the projects must clearly tie back to City and community plans.

2   EXPLAIN WHY A PRIORITY MATTERS

Again, what is the public benefit? If workforce housing is a priority, why does that matter to the community? Even if it seems obvious to you, make sure you spell it out.

3   PROVIDE A CONCISE EXPLANATION OF WHAT A PRIORITY MEANS

What exactly does the MRA mean by workforce housing? Or sustainable development? Remember that the public is smart but not always aware. Create short explanations that still leave room for flexibility.

4   CLARIFY HOW A PRIORITY WILL BE ACCOMPLISHED

If the MRA chooses workforce housing as a priority, does that mean the MRA is building it? Supporting developers who are building it? Land Banking? Be specific.

5   MEASURE PROGRESS TOWARD ACHIEVING THE PRIORITY

Many interviewees asked for a dashboard. It's important to keep track of how you are meeting your priorities and to communicate that openly. The website is a great place to show this publicly.

6   SET SPECIFIC TARGETS FOR THE FUTURE

Concrete targets will show that the MRA is not giving "handouts" to developers but rather working towards clear community goals. It will also help get the public on board.

Recommendations

- Create a detailed strategic plan much like the one created for Prosper Portland, and keeping in mind the MIT Sloan Management Reviews suggested steps. This document should be clear and user-friendly with language that all can understand. This is your "put a person on the moon" document. It is a guide for the MRA, the City, and the community as a whole for how to improve the lives of Missoulians. The plan should also work in concert with the strategic plans and other efforts of the City, Missoula Economic Partnership, the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, and other relevant organizations. This plan should explicitly define MRA's:

  - » Mission

  - » Vision

  - » Values

  - » Challenges

  - » Overall priorities/goals for the MRA

  - » Objectives for achieving those goals

  - » Partners

  - » Interdependent plans

  - » Measures of Success

- Get community input in the strategic planning process.

  - » Refer to this document and others such as the work of LEARN Missoula and any other available community research.

  - » Do direct outreach to the community to set community goals and priorities.

    - • Create a survey with options for goals/priorities set by staff and

Board e.g., housing, sustainability, infrastructure, deconstruction, etc. Make sure to include space for write in options in case there are concerns the City does not know are a priority for the community

- Set up a survey on Engage Missoula

- Create neighborhood events to help people fill out the survey

- Create doorhangers with a clear address for the Engage Missoula site

  ◊ Ask neighborhood councils to distribute

  ◊ Work with existing community groups and ask them to distribute

  ◊ Hire students to take it door-to-door in a sampling of neighborhoods not covered by community groups. If nobody answers, leave the doorhanger.

- Create an infographic that clearly shows the goals.

- Put these priorities on the website and use them in all collateral and presentations.

- Based on these priorities, all communication should follow this format:

  » Benefit to the community

  » MRA priority

  » City plan it supports

  For example:
  "This project benefits the community by deconstructing the old building and keeping 1.2 tons of waste out of the landfill which meets the MRA's priority of encouraging sustainable development and supports the City's Zero by Fifty initiative."

- Create graphic icons for each priority that will be used for case studies, memos, presentations, signage, etc., so that the public can easily see which community priority is being met.

By setting priorities and tying projects back to plans, the MRA will help the public see what the Board sees — strong projects with clear community benefits that meet the larger goals of the City as voiced by community members. But by not setting clear goals, it leaves community members wondering who TIF

really benefits.

A few additional notes:

- Many interviewees pointed out that goals are often buried in the various plans.

- They also noted that there are a lot of overlapping plans so it would be helpful to pull the goals out of the plans and show by neighborhood.

- Clear priorities will help businesses and smaller developers know what kind of projects they can bring to the MRA, which will increase the diversity of projects.

Foundations

EMBRACE THE "WHY" NOT THE WEEDS

When people have been doing something for a long time and/or have specialized knowledge and/or find themselves deeply involved in lots of projects, it is easy to forget that outsiders don't readily see the importance of these projects or, more importantly, how the projects are of benefit to themselves. As humans, we tend to jump into the "what" or the "how" of a project, hoping that if we can just make someone understand how something works, they will understand why it matters.

The first question every interviewee was asked was "how do you define TIF?" Most responses jumped straight into the weeds and quickly got lost there:

> *I say that we reinvest tax increments. It's an economic development tool into areas of the city and projects that need help, but also are eligible because of where they are and what they're doing. And we help both businesses and public projects, but everything has to be in the light of, for public benefit. So it's what pieces of the projects are in the public right of way. But there are things like the facade improvement project program where, if we have an urban renewal district where we can give money straight to the outward facing parts of private businesses, that will improve the community by taking care of blight and making the edifices of these buildings look better. And that has design standards that have to be met to get this public funding. But this is pretty much the one big economic development tool. We have to utilize it and we have been utilizing it really well for years with some big projects. And then some small projects like the Dairy Queen in Midtown, they were able to receive help they otherwise probably would not have made a pretty looking DQ express. They would've done a cookie cutter project, but there's stone and there's landscaping. And there's things that the public gets to enjoy on the outward side of that project, because a private project that we were able to do because of Tax Increment Financing and the way our tax structure works.*

But our brains actually work in the opposite way. It is not until we process why something matters that we are curious about how it works. If we pull out the benefits to our target audience and make a sentence around those, we create an entryway for our audience.

For example:

> " *The MRA uses tools like TIF to help the City create community improvements like housing, infrastructure, parks, sidewalks, and other amenities for the public good.*

This statement says nothing about how TIF works, or the legal mandates, or even blight. All of that information can be given when/if the person wants more information. But, by leading with the "why," you are giving your audience information that they can easily digest. This is not to say that the MRA should avoid talking about the details. Transparency and accuracy are important for trust. It just means that you should not lead with the details.

Another important reason to stay out of the weeds and focus on the broader picture is diversity and inclusivity. One interviewee pointed out that expecting people to understand the complex nature of TIF both is a "high bar of privilege" and creates mistrust in the MRA:

> " *It's a high bar of privilege to require someone to understand these different aspects of the ins and outs of these projects. Cynical me thinks that the reason that you want to stay in the weeds is because you're trying to maybe obstruct the actualities of this being a way for developers to make money and for the decisions about those developments to be in the hands of a small few, so you talk about the minutiae, as opposed to talking about the broader vision.*

Recommendations

- The number one recommendation in this plan is to put the "why" first every time. Always lead with the community benefit. From the names of projects to the first line of the project memo to key talking points for the press, every instance of communication needs to start with the reason the project is necessary to provide a benefit to the community. It is the standard by which all MRA projects are assessed and should also be the standard by which all communication is based.

- Always work to paint a broader picture that is accessible to all.

" *There is a possibility that I have dramatic misconceptions about this process because in terms of communication, the focus is not on those billboard level items. It's on the small stuff.*

MINDSET SHIFT

Many interviewees pointed out that the MRA has been so busy doing the work that they have not thought about communicating the work. They say the agency is full of policy people that talk in industry/technical terms and passionately work to make the community better but don't think about informing people along the way. This is the second-most important shift that the MRA needs to make.

Recommendations

- Everyone that works for and supports the MRA (staff, Board members, City Council members, etc.) must always be aware of the need for communication and opportunities to educate. Even if the MRA has a designated communications person, everyone is still responsible for helping the public understand the MRA and its use of TIF.

- Everyone also needs to be fully aware of the "why" for each project as well as the "why" for the MRA. This communications mindset shift should also be a part of training for each new employee.

- Knowledge should never be assumed. Acronyms and jargon should be minimized in public. Everyone needs to get in the habit of leading with community benefit and changing the way they refer to projects.

- Always consider the diverse populations of Missoula and create materials that are accessible and relevant to all.

COMMITMENT TO TRANSPARENCY

A lack of transparency is one of the most consistent criticisms of the MRA and its use of TIF. Even if the information is there, say interviewees, it is either buried, written in a way that an average citizen could not understand, or incomplete. For example, if the MRA says they are spending $1million on affordable housing, what percentage of the entire MRA budget does that represent? More than anything, interviewees want easily accessible and complete information.

The City of Chicago provides a good example of transparency. Suffering from public criticism about a lack of transparency, the mayor created a TIF Reform Task Force to increase TIF transparency. One of their main initiatives was creating an "open data portal" with extensive links to information about each TIF District and the individual projects within them.

From *Improving Tax Increment Financing (TIF) for Economic Development* by David Merriman for the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy:

> *A direct link from Chicago's mapping portal allows users to access the associated 111-page redevelopment agreement, amendments to that agreement, a Department of Planning and Development staff report on the project, and several other related documents. These reports detail the legal basis for the project, projected costs, and timelines...Chicago's portal also provides separate access to data about beginning and ending balances, revenues, and expenditures in the TIF District.*

Recommendations

- Follow the lead of Chicago by creating detailed interactive maps on the website with links to redevelopment agreements and total TIF and non-TIF planned investments.

- Eliminate acronyms and insider terms on all public documents.

- Provide more data including but not limited to:

  » Complete budget for the MRA and each URD

  » Tracking of MRA spending

  » Growth forecasts to help the public evaluate the costs and benefits of TIF projects

» Follow up information on whether the goals of projects were realized

» Public goals and metrics for developers on each project

- Make every possible document public.

- Give all data complete context.

- Put the statute governing TIF on the website and explain what it means.

- Create a clear and public list of what the MRA can and cannot do with TIF by law.

- Have someone on the MRA staff – ideally the communications director – available to happily explain the MRA and its use of TIF, and all data. They should be able to answer any questions. This should be someone who does not get frustrated with repeated questions and being presented with erroneous information.

CONSISTENCY OF LANGUAGE

Many interviewees pointed out that inconsistency of language is confusing to the public.

> *Stop using urban renewal district and TIF district interchangeably - it's confusing people.*

Some also recommended that TIF not be used at all:

> *I think we need to stop using TIF (in our language). Nobody understands what it is.*

And others pointed out that the term "economic development" is often confused with the idea of economic attraction, which isn't the case.

> *When you hear economic development, you think of corporations, rich people, like "how do I, as an average school teacher, benefit from economic development?*

The MRA needs to be more mindful and consistent with language and naming.

■ **DISTRICT NAMES SHOULD BE BY NEIGHBORHOOD**

The shift from calling districts by jargony terms like "URD III" to more neighborhood friendly terms like "Riverfront Triangle" was a good one. Any active or future districts should have neighborhood friendly names.

■ **REFER TO PROJECTS AS MRA PROJECTS, NOT TIF PROJECTS**

People do not know what TIF stands for. When you bring it into the equation, you have to explain what it is which diverts attention away from the project and into the weeds of financing. By calling it an MRA project, you shift the conversation back to public benefit and the community priority list and away from abstract arguments around taxes. This is not to say that you should hide the fact that the projects are funded by TIF. Always be transparent and honest. But by leading with TIF, you are inviting conversations about a tool rather than about the project and its goals and benefits.

■ **CHANGE THE NAME OF PROJECTS**

When you refer to a project as the "Stockman Bank" project, it is natural for people to conclude that money is going to Stockman Bank. Simply using the address is not advised since it will look like an attempt to disguise that money is going to a developer. Instead, go back to the public benefit and take the opportunity to inform and educate when naming projects.

For example:

» *Deconstruction and sewer lines at 123 Main Street*

» *Streetlights at 456 Higgins*

» *Sidewalks on Maple Street*

"Call the project 100 feet of sewer line at X address. Yeah. Perfect. I think that's kind of groundbreaking in it's simplicity."

■ **KEEP ALL COMMUNICATION SIMPLE**

As one interviewee said, "People don't want complicated answers to things. They want very simple answers." Keep all communication as short and concise as

possible. If you have a lot of information, layer it. Use headlines, sub-headlines, bullet points, and infographics. Someone should always be able to get the basic story at a glance.

■ **DON'T USE THE TERM "ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT"**

From the interviews, it became clear that many people in the community might be equating "economic development" with "economic recruitment." As Grant Kier, CEO and President of Missoula Economic Partnership says, "I don't even use the term 'economic development.' I feel like it is so abstract and meaningless to most people it's just not worth using…I actually feel like it's like antithetical to most people's value set.

"BLIGHT" AND "BUT FOR"

The word "blight" and the "but..for" clause are two very subjective concepts and the foundation of much of the criticism about the MRA's use of TIF. Many of the people interviewed for this report were confused about whether a determination of blight was necessary to just form the District or if it applied to each project. As one interviewee asked, "once a District is established does MRA have free reign to develop anything in the District or does each project have to have an element of blight?" The same question exists for the concept of "but for."

Recommendations

■ Clearly explain these two concepts of "blight" and "but for" and how they are used in determining the feasibility of projects.

■ Create printed and digital pieces that educate the public on what can and cannot be considered blight, how to use the but…for clause, and how both are used by the MRA.

ACCOMMODATE FOR DIFFERENT TARGET AUDIENCES

Always remember that your audience is large and varied. It is crucial that you always provide multiple avenues and platforms to understand and educate the public about the MRA and tools like TIF. Always

communicate as if you are speaking to someone who has never heard about the work that the MRA does, unless you know for sure that your audience is well-informed about your projects.

Recommendations

- Create different versions of information based on the target audience

    » Create a general and an "in the weeds" version of information
      For example, have a high-level brochure and a detailed "how it works" brochure. And always have really detailed information available on the website

    » Create both print and digital versions of information

    » Make sure all information is ADA compliant

    » Always consider diversity in representation

    » Create different versions of key information translated into the many different languages relevant to our diverse Missoula population (including our growing refugee populations.)

DATA

Another request from many interviewers was to provide more data:

> It's hard to really prove, maybe impossible to prove who's right. I mean, I'm a numbers guy. I like to look at numbers and figure out what, you know, where the numbers need to be.

It is important that the MRA use its current data and add to it with statistics that definitively show the long-term benefits to the community.

Recommendations

- Collect and use data as often as possible including:

» Benefits to the community for projects, e.g., how many people have used the health clinic or the food bank, number of people who now have affordable housing, number of families who can now use sidewalks to walk their kids to school.

■ Consider having an economist do a "definitive objective study" on the long-term benefits of TIF-funded projects. This may be a joint project with the Missoula Economic Partnership (MEP)

■ Also do an impact study from the "developers' side." How many people are they now employing? Are these community members? What is their pay? How has that effected Missoula's economy in general?

Messaging

Immediate Messaging

Missoulians are struggling with income inequality, a shortage of housing, rent increases, systemic issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion, an influx of new residents, an increase in our homeless population, economic and psychological effects of the pandemic, and a host of other big issues.

While the MRA absolutely needs to put resources towards communication, the MRA must dispel fears that it is funding a "spin campaign." To do this, the MRA needs to acknowledge past missteps with communication then explain that communications spending is solely for the purpose of increasing transparency and participation with the community.

Immediate Recommendations

First, the MRA needs to acknowledge past issues with communication that have led to some of the issues in the community and publicly state how they are going to be fixed.

- **TELL THE COMMUNITY THAT YOU ARE LISTENING**

  » Say things like: "We hear you."

- **ACKNOWLEDGE SHORTCOMINGS**

  » "We realize that we haven't done a good job of sharing information about the work the MRA is doing on behalf of the Missoula community. We know that information is the key to transparency, and we are committed to providing more consistent, accessible and understandable information to everyone in our community."

- **SAY WHAT YOU ARE WORKING TO FIX**

  » Start with the big picture:

"This starts by working with the community to create clear goals and objectives to help prioritize our projects and make clear how each of our investments benefit the public."

- **THEN BE MORE DETAILED**

  » "We are re-doing our website and our systems, creating more accessible data, project descriptions, educational videos, clear signage, and other tools to make our work as accessible and transparent as possible."

- **COMMIT TO MORE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

  » "We are also committing to working with the City to find ways to implement community suggestions from this report and others for a broader and more productive system for community engagement."

- **PROVIDE AN AVENUE FOR DISCUSSION (AND DESIGNATE SOMEONE TO FOLLOW UP)**

  » "We want to hear from you so please call or email with any concerns or ideas."

- **START INCLUDING THE COMMUNITY IN YOUR COMMUNICATION (AND MEAN IT)**

  » "Together, we have a lot of good work to do in Missoula".

Future Messaging

Eventually, after the MRA creates clear goals, messaging should always center around those priorities. Messaging should also be inspiring and continue to include the community.

As one interviewee said,

*The broader vision should be, "we can use TIF as a tool to solve the housing crisis in Missoula...
And we can use TIF as a tool to enrich our community and strengthen our ability to educate our
kids in a creative, forward thinking way."*

This is great advice, and great language.

Future Recommendations

- Create messages of inspiration that:

    » Focus on the goals

    » Involve/include the community

    » Highlight outcomes

- Use these messages on all communications. Vary the usage of TIF in the headlines
  so that the focus is on the MRA. For transparency, spell out that the MRA is using
  TIF as a tool to accomplish a community goal. For example:

    » Videos – "We can use TIF to help solve the housing crisis in Missoula.
    Here's how."

    » Brochure on deconstruction – "We can use TIF to help us be a zero-waste
    community. Here's how."

    » Powerpoint - "We can create strong infrastructure in our neighborhoods.
    Here's how."

    » Neighborhood meeting poster – "We can create healthy neighborhoods.
    Let's build prosperity for everybody."

General Messaging

Now and in the future, the MRA should talk about the agency, not the tools. The City has a vision and the
MRA is working towards making that vision a reality. Start there.

General Recommendations

- Messaging now and in the future should start with the why:
  "The MRA exists to support the City of Missoula's vision for an inclusive city where all people can live and celebrate meaningful, purposeful and fulfilling lives in a community offering unparalleled recreational, cultural and entrepreneurial opportunities."

- That is a mouthful when speaking and not writing.
  For more casual encounters, simply say:
  "The MRA exists to support the City of Missoula's vision for an inclusive city where all people can live and celebrate meaningful, purposeful and fulfilling lives."

- Then you can give examples:
  "We do this by using redevelopment tools to create community improvements like housing, infrastructure, parks, sidewalks, and other amenities for the public good."

Once the MRA has communications systems in place and clear goals, it can drill down into more specific messaging.

Communications and Engagement Position

The MRA's work is ever-changing and high profile. Some of the work detailed in this plan can be completed in-house and some can be completed by an external vendor. However, much of the MRA's work is ongoing. It is important that the public and the media have consistent, timely, and proactive information. It is also crucial that the MRA and the City of Missoula have a means of clear, direct engagement with community members. One-way communication will help the current situation, but it will not solve it.

The City of Missoula needs a more robust communications department that can support the work of the MRA. In the meantime, the MRA needs a dedicated communications professional and community engagement person.

Recommendations

- The City of Missoula should create a full communications, community engagement, and public information department headed by a chief communications officer. See the chart on the next page.

- If or until the City creates a full communications department, the MRA needs a full-time employee that can provide and/or oversee Media Relations/Public Information, Branding/Marketing, and Community Engagement specifically for the MRA. Please note, this is not a part-time position and should not be given to a staff member with no experience in communications and public engagement.

Chief Communications Officer

Director of Media Relations/
Public Information

Director of Branding/
Marketing

Director of Community
Engagement

Media Relations/Public
Information Department

Branding/Marketing
Department

Community Engagement
Department

Responsible across
all departments for:

- Press relations
- Emergency
  Communication
- Social Media

Responsible across
all departments for creation
or oversight of:

- Creating and maintaining
  a cohesive City brand
- All City visual materials
  (collateral, signage, etc.)
- City and department
  website
- Photography
- Video
- Animated Videos

Responsible across
all departments for:

- Proactive relationship
  building with all community
  groups and members
- Consistent outreach
  and open dialogue with
  Community groups and
  organizations
- Working with department
  heads (in particular
  the Neighborhoods
  Coordinator), City staff
  and contractors to
  assure all public events
  and opportunities for
  engagement are truly open,
  accessible and equitable for
  all

Level One Tactics

BOARD DOCUMENTS

BOARD MEMOS

The information gathered for the Board memos will be the basis for every case study, presentation, etc., so keep this content simple, free of jargon and acronyms, and easy to understand by someone with limited or no knowledge of MRA tools or procedures. This information will also exist on the case study questionnaire that project managers will need to fill out for each project. Depending on internal procedure, the memos may originate from that process or vice versa.

Recommendations

- All Board memos should have a quick cover sheet that makes it easy for the public and the press to understand the basics of the project.

- The memo should always follow the same order:

    » Public benefit

    » MRA priority

    » Relevant plans

    » Project description

    » Costs to the MRA

    » Public/private investment

    » The "But…for test"

    » Return on Investment

    » Relevant past projects

- » Estimated increment with and without project

- » Opportunity costs

- » Financial instrument and hierarchy of bonds

- » District sunset date with and without project bonds

- » Percent of district capacity represented by the funding

- » Annual debt service

- » Bond term

“

Kind of a checklist…the shopping list of this project…if you look at the project as like we're going to take a trip together as a community, what are we going to need? You know, it's this, this and this that we need to start this trip together.

MINUTES FROM BOARD MEETINGS

The current minutes are very thorough and transparent and should remain as is. However, in keeping with our recommendation to accommodate for different target audiences, we recommend that the MRA create three versions of the minutes.

Recommendations

- Keep current minutes as is for those who want the detailed information.

- Add a public friendly summary with a paragraph or two on each item for those who want a concise version. Make sure this version spells out any acronyms and gives context to any technical or procedural information.

- Add a one-page cover with just bullet points with key information. Be careful here

to avoid acronyms and information without context.

Examples

Please see example board memo in the Appendix "Board Memo Example" on page 130

> *MRA needs to tell their story. They are always on the defensive. People hear what they are doing at City Council meetings where there is negativity. Unless you read the Board minutes you really don't have any idea of all they are accomplishing and doing for the town in every little pocket here and there. And they have such a great story to tell.*

Most interviewees mentioned that they would like to see case studies of MRA projects. Interviewees say that the MRA needs to do a better job of "telling their story," and "controlling the message."

Good case studies can be housed on the website and used in every possible form of communication from social media and brochures to an annual report and PowerPoint presentations.

Recommendations

- Create case studies for every MRA project moving forward and key projects that have happened in the past.

- Highlight projects that benefit the community like housing, the Food Bank, etc. But create case studies of all projects for transparency.

- Case studies should follow the information provided on Board memos. This is repetitive and that is the point. The MRA needs to be clear and consistent in all communication and must constantly highlight facts that counter common misinformation.

- The MRA needs an internal system for collecting information to simplify the process of creating case studies. We suggest that project managers keep a form like the one provided in Appendix "Case Study Collection Form Example" on

<u>page 146</u> with each project folder and keep it up to date. At the end of the project, the person responsible for communications can easily create a case study following our recommended case study template.

- We recommend that the MRA get consent from property owners at the beginning of the project to allow for signage at the location of development (both during construction and a smaller permanent sign upon completion), photography, and a short quotation about the project to be used as a testimonial.

Examples

See Appendix <u>"Case Study Collection Form Example" on page 146</u> for Collection Form and Appendix <u>"Case Study Template Example" on page 150</u> Case Study Template

PROJECT PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

High-quality photography is crucial to the success of case studies and social media posts. Video is not as necessary but will be a strong addition to the library of video case studies. Ideally, the MRA will engage a professional photographer and videographer to take before, during, and after photos/videos of each project. If this is not possible, a designated staff member with a good camera or latest model iPhone may be able to take the photos. Perhaps a University of Montana Media Arts student could be hired to take video which can then later be edited as needed.

Recommendations

For each project, the MRA needs the following photography:

- High-resolution (300dpi) photos

    » Minimum resolution recommendation: 3,000 pixels wide.
    This will help produce quality images for all web uses, as well as smaller print pieces.

- A mix of horizontal and vertical photos for use in both print and web.

- Photos of the site before, during, and after development. If there are clear signs of blight, please capture. Ideally there would be:

    » Aerial photos before, during, and after

    » Panoramic photos before, during, and after

    » Details of areas the MRA is addressing (lack of sidewalks, no lighting, building to be deconstructed, etc.

    » Candid photos of people—photos of places can get boring. It's always best to add people when appropriate. Try to avoid staged photos where people are looking into the camera. Instead get shots of people working, talking about the project, or enjoying the benefits of the project e.g., before: teenagers walking on a street and after: little kids walking on a sidewalk

For key projects, the MRA needs the following video:

- Background video of the project (B-roll) that includes

    » Before, during and after footage both aerial and on the ground

    » Details of areas the MRA is addressing

    » Candid video of people working

    » Interview with staff member, board member, and relevant community/business member if possible

The website is the hub of all MRA information and the first place people with internet and/or mobile access go to find out information about the MRA and its tools (e.g. TIF) and projects. This is the most important tool for MRA communications and must be kept up-to-date. It is also the number one thing that interviewees called out as being problematic for MRA communications.

From the communications perspective, I think it's frustrating. I mean the website, it's just hard to find information and when you do, it's buried in an audit and somebody who's not like an accountant, can't understand it.

The current site is housed on the website for the City of Missoula (https://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/).

The City website is very functional and meets the difficult criteria for public sites who must consider accessibility and archiving needs to a much higher degree than most websites. However, almost every person interviewed for this report said they found the City website, "frustrating," "difficult to navigate," "not visually appealing," "not user-friendly," and "not a good platform for storytelling," etc.

Our number one recommendation is that the City create a communications department (as described in "Communications/Engagement Personnel") and build a new website on a more dynamic platform. If that is not an option, there are three routes the MRA could go when considering a new site.

1   CONTINUE TO STAY ON THE CITY SITE AND UPDATE NAVIGATION AND CONTENT

»   Pros

- The MRA is a City agency and needs to have a presence on the City site.

- The MRA also needs to communicate that it is supporting City policies and priorities that come from the community. This option would support that message.

- Current staff already know how to update content on this site.

» Cons

- The current City site is not user-friendly.

- The MRA will be limited in its ability to tell its story.

- The MRA will not be able to utilize photos, video, and other graphic elements effectively.

2   CREATE A NEW SITE SEPARATE FROM THE CITY

» Pros

- The MRA would have more flexibility with structure, content, and design.

- The MRA would be able to tell a more comprehensive story.

- The site would be more user-friendly and easier to navigate.

» Cons

- The MRA needs to communicate that it is supporting City policies and priorities that come from the community. This option would send a different message.

- Staff would need to learn to update the site in the new CMS (this is not difficult.)

3   CREATE A HYBRID SOLUTION WHERE THE MRA HAS BOTH A PRESENCE ON THE CITY SITE AND A "COMMUNITY WEBSITE"

Much like the Zero by Fifty Plan:
(City site: https://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/2087/Zero-Waste)
(Community site: https://www.zerobyfiftymissoula.com/).

» Pros

- The MRA would maintain a presence on the City site while also having the freedom of a separate site.

» Cons

- This could be confusing for some users

- It would be difficult to archive all content

Ideally, the MRA website would continue to be housed on the City website but be greatly redesigned. However, we are not familiar with the content management system (CMS) used by the City. It may be possible that our recommendations can be implemented on this CMS.

Our recommendations, therefore, are a guide to general navigation and function of the optimal MRA website. If our recommendations can closely be followed on the current CMS but need to be altered, we are happy to work with the MRA's technical team to make adjustments.

> ## The more complex your topic, the simpler your design needs to be.
> – GILL ANDREWS

The site map in Appendix "Website Site Map" on page 154 is a suggestion for the information architecture (IA) of the website. It reflects a hierarchy of content and navigational pathways that make the user experience as easy and pleasant as possible. We have also included an example of a redesigned homepage design based on the current City site and an example of how we would structure it on a platform like WordPress.

Website Recommendations

- Work with the City to create a new more user-friendly website that allows for storytelling and more dynamic content including large photos, videos, and infographics.

- Create a new MRA website on the current City platform OR create a hybrid version where basic information lives on the City website with a link to a new, independent community website (depending on CMS capability).

- Follow the suggested site map in Appendix "Website Site Map" on page 154 suggestions for information hierarchy.

- Follow the suggested content outline in Appendix "Website Content Outline" on page 155 for information hierarchy.

- Make sure the new site follows Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (https://www.w3.org/WAI/standards-guidelines/wcag/).

- Create a more user-friendly URL that the MRA can use on all communication. The URL can re-direct to the current site (or new site in future). Make the URL MissoulaRedevelopmentAgency.com or MissoulaRedevelopentAgency.gov.

- Make sure to make the site welcoming and explicit in the MRA's commitment to diversity and equality including a land acknowledgement, ADU compliance and Non-Discrimination, and a clear commitment to diversity in its guiding mission. See the Parks and Recreation department page for guidance (http://www.ci.missoula.mt.us/158/About-Us).

- Follow any suggestions given by LEARN Missoula.

- Make sure there is a prominent link to the Engage Missoula platform from each project page.

Public Relations

The MRA needs to be more proactive with the press. Building trusted relationships with journalists takes time and a lot of effort but will pay off with more consistent and accurate coverage of the MRA. While many of the MRA's projects are confidential for long periods of time, it is imperative that the MRA release information to the public as soon as possible. Getting ahead of difficult stories with accurate information is key for better press coverage.

Recommendations

- Build a relationship with reporters (Missoulian, Missoula Current, TV and radio stations) who follow the MRA by:

  » Establishing a point person (preferably a communications director) that knows the details of every project and can communicate about every project through the lens of community benefit, MRA priorities, and how projects relate to community-generated plans. It is important that this person does all press relations. Do not ask each project manager to be responsible for press on their projects. Do not make this the responsibility of the Executive Director. This is a time-consuming job, and it is best that the Executive Director only be available for interviews. Do not make this a part-time responsibility and/or assign this role to an administrative person unless that person attends high-level meetings and is fully authorized to speak about complicated and potentially controversial subjects. PR is about relationship building. This person should fully understand the ins and outs of each project and be able to communicate them in a non-technical way.

  » The MRA designated press person should have one-on-one in person meetings with each reporter who covers the MRA to:

    • Establish a personal relationship based on mutual trust

    • Determine what interests each reporter

    • Determine how the MRA can be most helpful to the reporter (do

they need an on-camera quotation, do they prefer to be given photographs or do they have their own photographer, etc.)

» Calling the reporters on a weekly basis to update them on the progress of MRA projects and alert them to any new projects that can be made public.

- Create key talking points for every project that follow the guidelines and content structure for Board memos. Distribute to all Board and staff members and any other relevant stakeholders.

- Create a press kit (below).

- Create a press release for every project that follows the guidelines and content structure for Board memos. Include a quotation from the Executive Director, Project Manager, and any other relevant stakeholders. Call the reporter before sending the release to let them know it is coming and prep them for the story.

- Follow the news daily to anticipate potential issues and opportunities for the MRA.

PRESS KIT

To be proactive with the media, it's important to give them the resources that they need to give accurate information in their stories. A good press kit will also show journalists that you understand their needs which will help you develop stronger relationships with members of the media.

Recommendations

- Create a press kit (a PDF that can be sent via email or printed when necessary) to help media (reporters, TV producers, bloggers, podcasters) create stories about the MRA and MRA projects. This kit should include:

  » Background on the MRA

  • Why the MRA exists

  • Key priorities of the MRA

- Names and map of URDs

» Board and staff information

- List of Board members

- List of management

» Key press releases

- Keep this relevant and up to date (no more than six months prior)

» TIF brochure

» Case studies

- 2–3 of the latest, most relevant case studies

» Other press coverage

- Show positive press from the last six months

» Images

- Provide any photos that the press may use

- Provide links to any relevant videos

» Contact Information

- Best contact person

- Every possible way that person can be reached at any time

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Some staff members mentioned that it is hard to keep up to date about all the projects because there is always so much going on. It's important to have an internal means of communication with quick updates so that all staff members can speak knowledgeably about any project at any time.

Recommendations

- A designated communications person should be the hub of information for the office. They should have copies of all case study collection forms.

- Create clear systems for how to find information on each other's work.

- Consider an inner office messaging system like Slack to make internal communications easier.

SIGNAGE

One of the biggest complaints that interviewees have is that the public is not aware of the volume and breadth of projects that the MRA has done to improve our community.

> *People don't realize how much TIF money went into the Caras park area. And that was like the original TIF project. There's a sign down there but I would like to see just more awareness…it can be something small.*

Many interviewees requested signage to increase visibility of MRA projects:

> *There is low-hanging fruit, like just putting signage on projects, stamping, you know, something into each sidewalk. That is pretty basic.*

> *Do you remember in 2009, when Obama did the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act? And they would put signs out that says this bridge was paid for by…and they had the fun little, four symbols…so when people drove by, they saw that. If those were the things that came to mind when people first thought of TIF instead of Starbucks, then there would be a lot more community buy-in.*

> *Why isn't there just a sign on a bridge that says, this is funded by MRA?*

> *I wish we could have something on every project that we funded, whether it's permanent or not…something that's clear that this project was funded by the MRA. I want it on the sidewalk of every homeowner whose sidewalk and every business sidewalk got redone.*

Recommendations

- The MRA needs to create signage for every single project moving forward and retrospectively for all projects that are permissible.

- Design a "seal" for the MRA that can be used on multiple projects.

- Model the signage after The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act with similar considerations: www.fhwa.dot.gov/economicrecovery/arrasignguidance.htm

- *For example:*

- Design and create multiple sign types including:

  » Banners that can be hung at construction sites

  » Vinyl decals that can be put in windows

  » Concrete stamps for sidewalks

  » Trail signs or additions to trail signs that work with the guidelines from Parks & Recreation

- Again, these are MRA projects, not TIF projects. Consistency of language is still key. However, the current issue is about the use of TIF so we recommend that signage say:

  » Long version: "This project was funded by the Missoula Redevelopment Agency using Tax Increment Financing (TIF)."

  » Short version: "An MRA project using TIF funding"

  » Shortest version: URL (See "Website Recommendations" on page 57)

COLLATERAL

The MRA needs a few print pieces for people who prefer paper to digital. These collateral pieces should also be available as PDF versions that can be sent via email and posted on the website.

Recommendations

- Create the following short brochures:

  » General MRA—an overall piece about the MRA. This should be the main collateral that is distributed. This piece should include:

    • The purpose of the MRA

    • Priorities for the MRA

    • List of URDs and priorities for each

    • Featured project

  » TIF specific—a piece focused on how TIF works. This piece should be given out when people need/ask for more information, specifically on TIF. It should include:

    • Explanation of TIF based on benefits like: "TIF is a tool that helps the City create community improvements like housing, infrastructure, parks, sidewalks, and other amenities for the public good."

    • Explanation of how the MRA uses TIF as a tool to accomplish MRA priorities

    • Infographics

    • Featured Project

  » Key Projects—a quarterly collateral piece that highlights key projects. This can either be one piece with projects from different URDs or a rotating focus on individual URDs. It should include:

    • Brief description of the MRA

    • Brief case studies of 2-3 projects

- All the items from the case studies (public benefit, plans addressed, etc.)

  » A very detailed, "in the weeds" brochure for those who ask for specifics. This piece should include

  - Reference to the law

  - Details on how a district is formed

  - Details on how money is allocated

  - Details on the structure of the money

  - Details on length of URDs

  - Details on bonds

- Create the following two-sided card:

  » Front side is the legal statue governing the MRA's use of TIF

  » Back side is a list of what the MRA can and cannot use TIF for based on this law

PRESENTATIONS

Many Board and Council members asked for a Powerpoint presentation to support them when speaking about the MRA. These presentations should follow a similar structure as the collateral materials.

Recommendations

Create the following slide presentations:

- General MRA—an overall piece about the MRA. This piece should include:

    » The purpose of the MRA

    » Priorities for the MRA

    » List of URDs and priorities

    » Featured project

- TIF specific—a piece focused on how TIF works. This piece should be used for audiences who are specifically concerned with TIF. It should include:

    » Explanation of TIF

    » Explanation of how the MRA uses TIF as a tool to accomplish MRA priorities.

    » Infographics/animation

    » Featured Project

- Key Projects—a slide presentation that highlights key projects. It should include:

    » Brief description of the MRA

    » Brief case studies of 2-3 projects

    » All the items from the case studies (public benefit, plans addressed, etc.)

- Comprehensive presentation with elements from all of the above.

INTERACTIVE MAPS

Many interviewees suggested that the MRA have maps that would show districts before and after MRA investment. These would allow people to see the real effects of TIF investments in Missoula neighborhoods.

> *I always thought it would be a good idea just to make a list of all the projects. We have GIS now. And so, we have interactive maps. We could show what's been accomplished and even show all those sidewalks over in the blighted neighborhoods and we can show all the developments and all the trails and all the parks and all the really cool stuff that we've done.*

Recommendations

- Create a general map for the TIF Index page that shows all the URDs. When the user clicks on one, they will get short information about that District and be able to click through to that individual URD page (see "Website Site Map" on page 154).

- Create interactive maps for each URD that live on the website. These maps should show all the TIF investments in the community. Ideally, a user would be able to click on a place and get short information about that project that links to a longer case study on the site (see "Website Site Map" on page 154).

- Create a video map for the website that shows development in each District. It would start with nothing then each project would be added chronologically to visually tell the story of the way TIF investment has changed each neighborhood.

- Create a video map of Missoula for the website that shows all the sidewalks that have been built throughout Missoula. It would start with nothing then each project would be added chronologically to visually tell the story of the way TIF investment has changed our neighborhoods.

Example
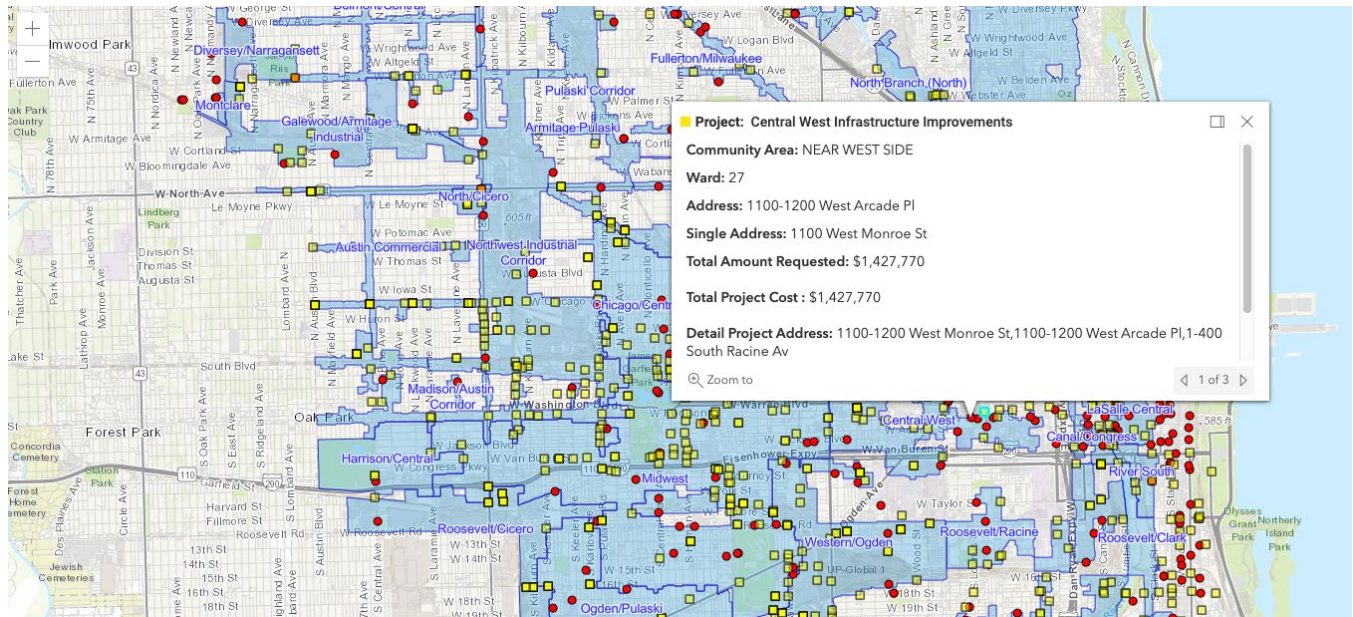
City of Chicago | TIF
https://webapps1.chicago.gov/ChicagoTif/

COMMUNICATIONS PACKAGE FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

The MRA is constantly working with elected officials at both the state and municipal levels. While some of the other foundational materials will be helpful for these officials, a designated kit, much like a press kit, would be helpful. Six Pony Hitch determined the recommendations for the content of this kit by speaking with a state legislator. This legislator also pointed out that it is important to assume that elected officials do not have much information about the MRA or it's use of TIF.

Recommendations

- Create a kit for elected officials (a PDF that can be sent via email or printed when necessary) to help elected officials understand the MRA's work and the importance of TIF as a tool for economic development and community prosperity. This kit should include:

  » Background on the MRA

    • Why the MRA exists

    • Key priorities of the MRA

  » Information on TIF

    • Short explanation of how it works with infographic.

    • Short explanation of process to determine how the money is spent. Legislators need to know the process, that there is a Board and how they determine who gets funded. Include list of Board members.

    • Short explanation of how the length of a URD is determined.

    • FAQs about misconceptions.

      ◊ TIF Districts do not drain the general fund by diverting money away from other jurisdictions.

      ◊ TIF dollars do not go to private property, they go to public improvements.

      ◊ Case studies (Legislator suggested 2-3 very different. Also suggested Starbucks since that is the one that "is always brought up.")

- How TIF dollars are leveraged for grant/federal funding.

» Contact Information

- Best contact person

COUNTY TAX BILL

Many interviewees, especially staff, mentioned that the County Tax Bill is confusing because it makes it look like residents are being assessed for TIF. Staff say they only get a few calls about this, but it undoubtedly leads to confusion and even supports the misinformation being spread around town.

Recommendations

- Work with the County to remove or change this bill.

- If that is not possible, then work with the County to add a line explaining why that fee is on the bill.

- Write and design an explanation of this tax bill that lives on the website under TIF FAQs and can also be sent as a paper version to people who call in. This way the explanation is clear and consistent. Refer to Prosper Portland's language on its FAQ section of the website:

  » "Urban renewal is a state-sanctioned program designed to help communities improve and redevelop areas that are physically deteriorated, unsafe, or poorly planned. Prosper Portland, the city's economic development and urban renewal agency, uses urban renewal as a tool to help specific areas of the City realize capital projects—parks, streetscape improvements, community centers, and the like—that would not happen on their own.

  The Urban Renewal line item shown on tax statements received by property owners within the City of Portland represents the amount collected for urban renewal activities. This amount is a combination of Prosper Portland's share of taxes assessed by taxing jurisdictions including the city, the county, and schools, and an urban renewal tax assessed by the City of Portland against all taxable property within the City of Portland. The urban renewal line item on your bill is not a new tax.

  For more information on your property tax bill, contact the Multnomah County Property Tax Assessment and Taxation office at 503-988-3326."

ENGAGE MISSOULA

The Engage Missoula platform is a great venue for the MRA. Every project should be added.

Recommendations

- Create listings for every project that follow the same guidelines and content structure as the Board memos and case studies.

- Monitor the comments and respond kindly and clearly to all.

TOOLS FOR PARTNERS

Partners and stakeholders in the MRA are ready and willing to help tell the MRA's story and engage with their own followers but they need tools to do so.

Recommendations

- Identify partners and stakeholders and contact them about how they can best support the MRA and what materials would be helpful for them.

- Create a digital folder of tools that each partner/stakeholder can use. This should include:

  » MRA collateral

  » MRA General Powerpoint

  » Links to videos

  » Key photography

  » Key infographics

- Press releases

UPDATES TO CITY COUNCIL

City Council members do not always get a chance to attend or watch Board meetings. Yet, they do want to be updated. In addition, many feel like they would like a notification about projects that could affect other issues that they are working on. They recognize that many projects are confidential until they reach the Board presentations but are looking for more informal updates so that they might be helpful in providing insight and input from the community during earlier stages of a project.

Recommendations

- Email Board memo cover letter and Summaries of minutes to City Council members

- Encourage Council members to sign up for newsletters

- Have weekly check-ins with the chair of the Administration & Finance committee

Level Two Tactics

VIDEOS

Videos will help the public understand difficult concepts like TIF. They are a great way to show the biggest challenges our community is facing and how we as a community can address them with the MRA and its use of TIF. Video case studies of high-profile projects could help the community and the media understand the facts. Animated videos will help educate the public on some of the complexities of TIF. Ideally, the MRA will shoot video of each project so there will be footage for future edits. Videos can be used on the website, on social media, in presentations and for community outreach.

Please note, Stirling Commercial Real Estate Advisors have created a series of videos about TIF. They can be found on their Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/sterlingCRE

The MRA may find these helpful and could ask Stirling if they could use them on the MRA website and/or social media until the MRA creates its own videos.

Recommendations

- Create one video for each MRA priority. For example, define the housing crisis, then show what the City is doing then show how the MRA is supporting those plans using TIF. Include case studies. Or, as another example, if one of the priorities is Sustainability then show why deconstruction is important and the many ways that it benefits the community. These videos should show the community that the MRA understands the issues and how the MRA is working in support of the community to solve them.

- Create case studies of high profile and controversial projects, for example:

  » Mary Street—tell the story of the Midtown Association and how Annette is working with the transportation group. Interview Mark Bellon. Talk to residents. Show how the project came to be, what the MRA actually did and how the street has affected the community. Clear up misperceptions about giving money to the mall by telling the actual story.

- Animated Videos (1-2 minutes)

» Create a series of animated educational videos that help people understand the MRA and its use of TIF. For example:

- What is the MRA? Show how the MRA works with City to make the community better. Talk about priorities, neighborhoods, public projects, etc.

- What is TIF and how does it work?

- What are eligible (legal) uses for TIF and how are funds allocated?

- Why public/private development is necessary to create funds to do public projects like housing.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media should be a level one priority for the MRA but, until there is a dedicated communications person or outsourced professional arrangement, the MRA should not engage in social media. This is not an administrative task.

Once the MRA has a dedicated communications person who can oversee the strategy and keep various platforms fresh by posting regularly, and monitoring engagement and comments across all platforms,the MRA should use social media as a tool for conversation with the community as well as for distributing information and education. Social media will also help the MRA to get out in front of press stories and drive the narrative instead of being forced into a reactive position.

We recommend that the MRA use three platforms: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter.

Facebook

Facebook is still one of the strongest and most active platforms in Missoula. Many people get all their news from it. It is also the most multi-generational platform used by everyday Missoulians, elected officials and those who use or may want to access MRA services. If the MRA only uses one platform, it should be Facebook.

Instagram

Instagram is a visual medium that will allow the MRA to launch videos and use the story function to showcase many projects at once. Instagram will also allow the MRA to use predetermined hashtags to connect its work to community priorities. A robust Instagram presence linked to Facebook will increase the success of both platforms.

Twitter

Twitter is still growing in Montana, but we recommend it here to keep in touch with reporters and media outlets. Most reporters in Montana use Twitter daily and we recommend establishing a presence on Twitter and communicating with the media here. Twitter moves in real time and so do reporters. It is an excellent way to engage them in the MRA's work.

1 STEP 1: SECURE HANDLES, ESTABLISH CHANNELS, SELECT AGGREGATE SITE

» The MRA needs to establish accounts for all platforms and use the same handle for all channels. The MRA is "Missoula Redevelopment Agency" on Facebook so it should be "@missoularedevelopmentagency" on Instagram and Twitter as well.

» Create consistent descriptions across all channels e.g., mission, description of the organization, taglines, etc.

» Create a social media avatar or image that the MRA will use across all channels for brand consistency.

» Choose an online aggregator like Hootsuite to post across all channels without having to post to each one separately.

2 STEP 2: COLLECT PHOTOS AND VIDEOS

» Collect photos, videos and content of MRA projects. Use professional photos whenever possible, but for social media, staff photos taken with cameras or iPhones are acceptable. Photos should be taken at clear angles with good light. They should highlight the positive aspects of a project and create interest in the post.

» Set up a calendar in Hootsuite or other aggregator.

3 STEP 3: CREATE FIRST CAMPAIGN, ASSIGN ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES, AND CREATE A POSTING CALENDAR

» Create a mini-campaign (five posts) to introduce the MRA's presence on social media.

» This campaign should highlight the new MRA goals and show projects that relate to them.

» Make sure written content follows the suggested format in this document.

Remember to put the public benefit first and explain how a project points back to MRA priorities and City plans. Use posts to paint a broad picture of the MRA's work and avoid jargon and acronyms that create barriers to understanding.

» Map out all posts along with any photos or video on Hootsuite and make sure it is clear who will write each post, who will post it, and who will engage with it. Detail roles and responsibilities to make sure the work gets done.

» Post twice a week across platforms. Use Facebook and Instagram posts for the MRA's main audiences and use Twitter posts to target local, regional, and national reporters and news outlets.

» See Appendix "Social Media Calendar Example" on page 167 for a sample one-month posting calendar.

4   STEP 4: ENGAGE, COMMENT, AND PLAN YOUR NEXT CAMPAIGN:

» Engage in real-time conversations by liking and commenting on social posts from other organizations/individuals. Research which keywords or hashtags to monitor, set alerts for those conversations, and contribute to them as they occur naturally and spontaneously on the three social media platforms. This will require a daily time commitment to review conversations, reply, and maintain the thread through the natural end of the conversations.

» Tracking trending hashtags and conversations over time to help manage the keyword list.

» Use hashtags on Facebook posts, but not more than two per post. All posts on Twitter and Instagram, whether planned or spontaneous, should be crafted with specific keywords and/or hashtags in mind.

» When sharing content from other sources, make it meaningful for the Missoula audience.

» While engaging and monitoring the current campaign, begin planning the next one. One campaign can inform the next one and the MRA communications director should monitor what resonates with the audience in each campaign in order to plan for the next one.

» Establish rules for social media engagement

• Establish some posting guidelines including:

◊ When to respond

◊ When to ignore a comment

◊ When to delete a comment. Don't delete or block a user as common practice, but it may be necessary at times and it is important to establish the parameters for that ahead of time.

• Do not engage in mudslinging, negative jabs, or sarcasm. Do not be combative. Social media channels are not a place to prove someone wrong, but a place to guide them to information that may inform their thinking.

Recommendations by Platform

▪ Update the MRA's Facebook page.

» Post information about new projects that are going to be presented at the Board.

• Follow the same order of communication:

◊ Community benefit

◊ MRA priority that the project furthers

◊ City plans that the project fit

• Use high-quality photos and videos

» Post information about ongoing projects.

• See above

» Post information that relates to the MRA priorities.

» Post information that relates to URDs.

» Post information about engagement opportunities e.g., neighborhood meetings, events, planning sessions, etc.

» Follow other community individuals and organizations.

» Follow and repost community posts that are relevant.

» Monitor the MRA page and respond to comments.

» Monitor other pages and comment.

» Consider showing meetings on Facebook Live.

» Curate and post relevant news articles both local and national, including what other communities are doing, news related to priorities, etc.

- Create an Instagram account.

  » Post before, during and after photos of projects.

  » Post videos.

  » Create stories to showcase many projects at once. For example, "here are some of our deconstruction projects."

  » Follow other community individuals and organizations.

  » Follow and repost community posts that are relevant.

  » Monitor MDA page and respond to comments.

  » Monitor other pages and comment on posts.

- Create a Twitter account.

  » Post timely, immediate updates.

  » Follow all relevant local, regional, and national reporters (see "Media Strategy.")

  » Direct Message (DM) reporters for quick responses.

  » Follow other community individuals and organizations.

  » Post relevant news articles.

  » Share articles.

» Use this as a tool to communicate with reporters privately (DM) and publicly (by tagging them). Also share good articles by reporters that are relevant to the MRA.

Creating a newsletter is really just building an email list and sending out updates. But it is an important option for people who want to stay informed and helps the MRA stay proactively transparent.

Recommendations

- Create a monthly newsletter that includes:

    » An intro paragraph or two

    » Photo and brief update on current projects

    » Summaries of last Board meeting minutes

    » Board memo cover sheets for upcoming projects

    » Any relevant news

- Add a newsletter sign up button on the website.

- Collect emails during initial engagement work for URDs and plans for newsletter sign up.

- Use a service like MailChimp to keep a database of the names and emails of people who sign up for the newsletter and to send out the newsletter.

- Track which emails are most frequently opened and read to anticipate potential issues to get in front of.

CONTRIBUTE TO OTHER NEWSLETTERS

It is important that the MRA create its own newsletter and recipient list, but coordinating with other departments and individuals will help get the word out even farther.

Recommendations

- Create short newsletter pieces to be included in other people's newsletters. These pieces should include a digital folder that includes:

  » Story content—for example:

    • Announcement of new project

    • Announcement of Board meetings or other public meetings

    • Announcement of community engagement opportunity

    • Case study

    • Update on project

    • Statistics on development, housing, etc.

  » A photograph

  » Any relevant infographics, charts, etc.

  » Contact information

- Work with other individuals and organizations (City Council members, City departments, Missoula Economic Partnership, Homeword, etc.) that have newsletters to add MRA community-based news on a regular basis.

ANNUAL REPORT

The MRA has not done an annual report in years due to capacity issues. An annual report will provide transparency and help the community understand the year's finances.

Recommendations

Create a digital and print version of an annual report that includes:

- » Letter from the Executive Director

- » Case studies

- » Yearly financials

- » List of Board and staff members

Consider quarterly updates that include:

- » One case study

- » Quarterly financials

- » Metrics

ENGAGE CITY EMPLOYEES

Word of mouth is still the most effective tool for communication in Missoula. The City has a large workforce, and many City employees don't understand TIF. The City has an intranet, but it is not well-used. The County uses video reader boards in conference rooms and break rooms but changes to the City due to COVID-19 and growth have eliminated many of these gathering spaces.

Recommendations

- The communications person should work with each City department head to arrange an all departmental meeting. At each meeting, an MRA board member can present general information about the MRA and its use of TIF, show any relevant videos, and then be available for questions.

BOARD OUTREACH

When interviewed, many Board members suggested that they would like to be doing more outreach. Once the foundational elements are completed, the Board will have supporting materials for various types of outreach.

Recommendations

- It would be really helpful for Board members to be involved in community planning events. As one member said, "going to the meetings with the community give you the full picture, which you can't get from the engineer's report."

- It would also be helpful for Board members to reach out to members of the community for coffee and lunch dates. Consider having the communications person identify members of the community who are vocal in the press, on social media, and at City Council meetings for Board members to invite for one-on-one discussions.

- The MRA communications person should monitor community feedback and coordinate with Board members to write op-eds and letters to the editors in a pro-active manner.

- The MRA communications person should find speaking opportunities in the community and coordinate with Board members to do the presentations. There should be a yearly calendar of speaking engagements with designated back-up speakers.

- Have a press training for all Board members.

- Some Board members expressed interest in having house parties where they can educate small groups of people and answer individual questions. This is a great idea. Make sure to have collateral material at each event.

- The communications person can set up interviews for Board members on morning shows, radio programs, and other ongoing community news opportunities.

ENGAGE SUPPORTERS

There are many individuals, small businesses and organizations that support the MRA's use of TIF. These include, but are not limited to, people that have received TIF funding. Many of them are ready and willing to speak up for and support TIF and their enthusiasm needs to be tapped.

Recommendations

- The MRA communications person should create an up-to-date spreadsheet of all people, businesses and organizations who are willing to speak on behalf of the MRA. The comms person should make this list by reaching out to all MRA contacts to determine if they are willing to support the MRA publicly and the activities they are available to support. They should also work with the MRA project managers to gather this information on all current and future contacts. This spreadsheet should contain the following information:

    » Name of person, business or organization

    » Specific contact person at that organization

    » Email and phone number of specific contact

    » Relationship to the MRA and which program (if any) was used.

    » Checklist of items they are willing to do for the MRA:

        • Attend City Council meetings

        • Speak at City Council meetings

        • Give a testimonial for project

            ◊ Written

            ◊ Video

        • Appear in an MRA case study

            ◊ Have their project be featured

                * Give a quote for case study

* Be photographed for case study

* Be filmed for video case study

- Speak to press

  ◊ Print

  ◊ Broadcast

- Write an op-ed or editorial

- Write a guest entry for the MRA newsletter

- Appear at speaking events with Board member

- Act as a reference or make introductions on behalf of the MRA

- Attend City Council meetings to give public comment

- Other

» Availability (e.g. not on weekends)

PARTNER WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS ON COMMUNICATIONS

The MRA often works with other organizations and City departments. There is an opportunity to expand the reach of MRA communications by working with the communications directors from other partners. Just make sure that the goals of the organizations are in alignment and that all communication follow the order laid out in these recommendations.

From Grant Kier, CEO of Missoula Economic Partnership;

> *I feel like there is a role for us to play at MEP in championing TIF as an important entity and partner doing good work in the community. I think there's a role we can play strategically and thoughtfully… if we're talking about the great work they're doing, it's different than if they're talking about the great work they're doing…I think that if we were coordinated in a meaningful way, there are things we could do in some of our outreach and materials and storytelling that could really tee up the problems. And recognize them as part of the solution in that thoughtful and meaningful way.*

Recommendations

The MRA communications person should reach out to communication directors at relevant organizations to explore partnerships in communication.

NEXT DOOR APP

Many people in Missoula use the Next Door app to keep in touch with what is going on in their neighborhoods. There is a very active and vocal crowd here. As with social media, engaging on this app is not recommended unless there is a dedicated person who can monitor it daily and respond appropriately.

Recommendations

- Designate a person to post about new projects on the Next Door app.

- That same person should monitor and respond to comments.

AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

"If we put energy into building capacity in our neighborhoods, it would save them all this trouble because then there'd be buy-in from the beginning and the results might not be all that different, but the method is everything.

At the beginning of each URD, the MRA does community engagement based on the creation of the District. This work is usually done by an outside engineering or planning firm. According to the MRA, there is no process for community engagement once a URD is formed. However, MRA projects are all based on City priorities and plans, which are made with community involvement. The only other current avenue for public input is through City Council or at MRA Board meetings.

Staff, Board, City Council, and community members interviewed say that community input is important but point toward a lack of awareness on how to go about it. Strong community engagement is imperative to rebuild trust in the MRA and the City as a whole. A communications person at the MRA could help address some issues but the problem really is city-wide and we recommend that it be addressed as such.

> *There is a tendency to think that anyone who disagrees with me, my first thought is, well, you're wrong and, worse than that, you're probably stupid. And so, I think we've fallen into that kind of cultural polarization that, in the end, is not going to be a good way to approach this question.*

The MRA is currently in the midst of attacks by all sides of the political spectrum. It is hard to go to meetings where everyone is furious and approaching you with anger. However, many of the opponents to the MRA's use of TIF who were interviewed for this report also expressed frustration and a refusal to be heard by the MRA and elected officials.

While it is true that many public suggestions are not feasible or are based on misunderstandings, if the MRA is working for the public benefit, then it is important that the MRA consults the public. Therefore, based on some of the findings of this report, it is imperative that more focused attention and resources go toward community engagement.

Recommendations

- Read the excerpts from community organizers in Appendix "Community Engagement in Missoula" on page 169.

- Leadership at the City of Missoula and the MRA must approach community engagement with a desire to listen and learn. While City staff are experts in execution, community members can and will improve the process with ideas based on lived experience.

- Leadership must be open to organizational and procedural changes that are responsive to community insight.

- Leadership must not see engagement in terms of how many people were reached but rather consider engagement as a crucial piece that drives decision-

making processes.

- Leadership at the City of Missoula and the MRA need to make a serious commitment to:

  » Engage with the community by:

    • Proactively creating ways to meet with different segments of the community on a regular and ongoing basis.

    • Actively listening and responding to community members

    • Addressing concerns raised by the community

    • Involving the community in setting goals and priorities

    • Providing easy access to information for the community

  » Creating the capacity to do authentic engagement

  » Being inclusive in all forms of engagement throughout all departments. This includes considering venues, times, procedures, invitations, etc. to ensure that there are no elements of exclusion.

In order for community engagement to flourish, organizations (and individuals that represent those organizations) must be open to organizational changes that are responsive to community insight and allow for shared power between communities and the organizations that serve them. The process and results of increased community engagement must go beyond activities to involve more community members, but rather become a prominent organizational value that drives everyday decision-making processes.

– THE SEATTLE INCLUSIVE OUTREACH AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

THE BIG THREE

There are three general things that have to happen to ensure public engagement from community members, especially those in underserved communities:

1   Build and maintain trusting relationships person to person—create two-way exchanges of information that are dependent on conversations and collaborations.

2   Increase access to facilities and services—make consistent and concerted efforts to create opportunities for increased participation rather than barriers.

3   Provide diverse opportunities to get involved—always provide multiple points of access to accommodate for different abilities, comfort levels, and access to the political process.

Start Now

True community engagement is about building relationships. It is important that City engagement efforts consider all the different populations in our City and create a plan that allows for both going out into the community and inviting the community into City events in welcoming and accessible ways. This work should mainly fall under the purview of the recommended engagement department but every department in the City can begin to do this work now.

Recommendations

- Define where and how the public can influence decisions.

- Identify populations directly and indirectly affected by City projects.

- Define roles for the public, the office of engagement, the office of communications, the office of neighborhoods, elected officials, and any other stakeholders.

- Create a detailed engagement plan that includes key goals and milestones as well as specific activities and tactics (by target audience) to achieve those goals.

- Identify any outside needs like translators or consultants.

- Take into account information from other groups currently doing engagement work with different segments of the population. Ask for reports, suggestions, and any other findings from different community groups.

- Reach out to current community organizers to build trust and to create two-way exchanges of information. Even if, and especially if, the City has been criticized by these groups, it is important that City engagement personnel approach these relationships with an open mind and a mindset of listening and learning.

BUILD THE CAPACITY

Again, it is our recommendation that the City create a full communications department with three departments that work under a Director of Communications. And, if the City does not do this then the MRA needs a dedicated employee to fill this role of creating real engagement with community members. The following recommendations assume that the City follows the recommendation to put more attention and resources to engagement. If not, the MRA communications person should still follow the recommendations as capacity permits.

PLEASE NOTE: We are not suggesting that a dedicated engagement department means that other City staff and elected officials do not need to follow these recommendations. A centralized and dedicated team will help make sure that this crucial work is done. But every City department head should cultivate a mindset of being "open to organizational changes that are responsive to community insight and allow for shared power between communities and the organizations that serve them."

Recommendations

- The City of Missoula should create a full communications, community engagement, and public information department headed by a chief communications officer. That person should be responsible for three sub-departments, each with its own director.

- If or until the City creates a full communications department, the MRA needs a full-time employee that can provide and/or oversee Media Relations/Public Information, Branding/Marketing, and Community Engagement specifically for the MRA. Please note, this is not a part-time position and should not be

given to a staff member with no experience in communications and community engagement.

- The community engagement department should have a director and enough employees to carry out the recommendations in this and other related plans (LEARN Missoula, etc.).

- The community engagement department should work closely with all communication departments and City staff and with the Office of Neighborhoods.

- The engagement department needs to be doing work across all departments and with all communities.

- Engagement work should also include research into other community initiatives and training on best practices in community organizing.

- The director of the engagement department should attend all leadership meetings to ensure that community input is heard at the highest levels.

- Work with the City to create a "How to engage with City Government" page on the main City site that can be linked to from the MRA site. For an example, please see the page by the City of Austin (https://www.austintexas.gov/community).

ONGOING ENGAGEMENT

Recommendations

- Identify all the target groups in Missoula and begin to establish relationships with citizens by:

    » Reaching out to organizations who are already tied to or providing services to the target communities.

    » Reaching out to individuals in leadership roles.

    » Going to venues to find and meet community members and leaders (for example the Saturday farmers market is a good place to meet members of the Hmong community).

    » Attend community-driven events and activities (for example, many members of our various immigrant communities play soccer at Ft. Missoula).

- Continue building relationships by having engagement personnel in the community, at events, at neighborhood meetings, other organizing group meetings, etc.

- Engagement personnel should take note of issues that come up in conversation while out in the community and discuss with the head of the communications team as well as relevant department heads.

- The head of the engagement team should be at leadership meetings to both be aware of things that will be coming up with the MRA and the City and to bring feedback to the community to leadership. In this way, issues will be spotted in advance and the community voice will always be at the table.

FOR EACH INDIVIDUAL MRA OR CITY PROJECT

Recommendations

- Define which populations are directly or indirectly affected by the project.

- Define the constraints to public input e.g., previous contracts, funding limitations, legal constraints, etc. and communicate those restraints.

- Define what the objectives are in involving the public in the process. Be clear about what the MRA wants the community to contribute and how their input will influence decision making.

SPECIFIC TO THE MRA

If there is an engagement team, they should be doing ongoing community engagement. In addition, the MRA should actively engage the community, before, during, and after the life of a District.

Recommendations

- Have the community engagement team work on all plans with all consultants. Make sure contractors know to include their recommendations.

- Have the engagement and communications teams plan and run public meetings instead of/in addition to engineers.

- Work with the Office of Neighborhoods before, during, and after the life of a District.

- Consider other engagement processes. There was consistent feedback that people do not like the Charette process and are frustrated with "a" or "b" choices.

- Have regular check-ins with residents of districts.

  » Talk to people who were active when the District was originating.

  » Have open-house style meetings to present what has been done and get public comment on how they want to use the funds moving forward.

- In addition to a communications/engagement person, have Board members attend neighborhood council and other Health Equity, and/or community-based meeting in the districts.

- Gather names and emails at all events and create a database of people in each District to reach out to for community engagement events. Also, add to the MRA newsletter so community members can stay informed.

TIF ENGAGEMENT GAME

The MRA could "gamify" the education of TIF in the community by creating 2–3-hour sample "planning" session for the community where members are given a 3-D map of a URD, a sample budget with pretend dollars, 3-D printed building types (Office building, restaurant, large affordable housing building, small affordable housing building, retail store, hotel, etc.). Using the legal rules and restrictions for TIF funding, they could then "build a community." They would learn that you can't just start with affordable housing, you need to have some public/private partnerships to increase the budget. They would see that some places have no sidewalks and that some places need infrastructure. They could even get extra money if they consider diversity with a building/project.
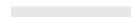
PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

The Seattle Race and Justice Initiative also created a great Public Engagement Matrix which we have reproduced here from their Inclusive Outreach and Public Engagement Guide. Please see Appendix "Public Engagement Matrix" on page 168.

INCLUSIVE PROCESS & GOVERNANCE

There are many opportunities to make the MRA more welcoming and diverse. While this is not in the scope of this report, we have included voices from the community and recommendations concerning communications and public engagement. We also provide some resources in the *Community Recommendations on Process & Resources from Secondary Research section.*

We strongly urge that the MRA and the rest of the City implement the recommendations that will be coming from the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community and detailed in the report from LEARN Missoula. We also strongly suggest that the MRA make a concerted effort to hire staff and engage Board members that are more diversely representative of the entire Missoula community.

"

I would like to know more about the Board of directors and what kind of approach they take to engage everyday people to be on the Board. For example, I would be surprised if any of their Board members are renters or people who live within the urban renewal districts. So, I wonder who is representing and making decisions for this agency on behalf of the community? It doesn't seem like everyday people. And that's probably why folks feel very distanced from the decision-making.

"

There are probably some people of color who might be interested in going after some of these opportunities regarding development, but don't understand them or don't even know they exist. I didn't even know TIF existed until this project. And I've lived here. I've read the Missoulian for years and I'm sure I probably saw it, but that's the thing is that it was the type of communication. It was aimed at people in the know. So, if there were articles about TIF, every realtor in town probably knew. But someone like me was like, I don't even know what that means. So, I'm just going to glance right over it.

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROCESS & RESOURCES FROM SECONDARY RESEARCH

COMMUNITY RECOMMENDATIONS ON PROCESS & RESOURCES FROM SECONDARY RESEARCH

The first thing to consider in improving communications is often how to improve the product or service. During our interviews, many people noted concerns about different aspects of the MRA and its administering of TIF. This section details recommendations from interviewees on key issues of process. It also includes resources found during our secondary research process that show relevant models from around the country.

HOUSING

Housing was one of the main concerns addressed in the interviews. See interview summaries for more information.

Community Recommendations

- Create rules that keeps affordable housing affordable so the owner can't hold the property for a few years and then flip it.

- Raise the ratio of TIF funding that goes to affordable housing to 50%.

- Consider having the City own and develop affordable housing.

- Increase land banking and support for non-profit developers.

- Find a way to implement inclusionary zoning.

- Provide developer incentives for affordable housing.

- Utilize more state Low-Income Housing Tax Credit matches.

- Use Transfer Development Rights.

- Use Purchase of Development Rights for open space associated with housing.

Resources

RESOURCE 1
From the website of Local Housing Solutions: https://www.localhousingsolutions.org/housing-policy-library/tax-increment-financing/

- *Examples:*
  "Through the Multi-Family TIF Purchase-Rehab Program, the City of Chicago allocates TIF revenues to support the redevelopment of vacant and foreclosed apartment buildings within specified TIF districts as affordable housing. Private developers are eligible to receive grant funding of up to 50 percent of the total project cost, and eligibility is limited to the purchase and rehabilitation of buildings with six or more units where "substantial rehabilitation" is required. (To reach the six-unit threshold, developers may group together smaller buildings in a two-block radius.) The redeveloped units must remain affordable to households earning up to 50 percent of the area median income for a period of at least 15 years. The city partners with Community Investment Corp, a private lender, to manage the program.

- The State of Minnesota authorizes cities and counties to create housing TIF districts in which incremental tax revenue may only be used to finance housing projects for low- and moderate-income individuals. Eligible activities include acquisition, construction, or rehabilitation of affordable housing, as well as professional costs and public improvements directly related to the affordable housing developments. Incremental tax revenue can be collected for 25 years after the receipt of the first increment, although collection may be postponed for the first four years to avoid using the duration limit when only a small amount of tax increment is likely to be generated.

- In Texas, cities can create Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZ) that do not need to meet any minimum criteria for blight. Eliminating the blight requirement opens up new possibilities for the application of Tax Increment Financing, including in gentrifying areas where the incremental tax revenue can be used to help preserve affordable housing. Texas' approach differs from other states in other ways as well. Each taxing unit within a TIRZ may negotiate the portion of the tax increment that will be dedicated to public improvements – an approach that allows more flexibility but may also make the TIRZ more complex to administer and possibly limit its revenue potential. In addition, private property owners can petition for the creation of a TIRZ when they own at least 50 percent of the appraised property value within the proposed TIRZ. To support affordable housing in large cities, privately-initiated TIRZ zones are required to allocate at

least one-third of the area to housing, and one-third of tax revenues to low-income housing. Learn more about TIF laws in Texas."

RESOURCE 2

From "The ABCs of TIF" by Robert R. Eversberg and Paul R. Goebel:

- "Three features distinguish Texas' legislation from that of other states. Usually, only cities or governmental entities can designate an area as a TIRZ. In Texas, however, owners of properties constituting at least 50 percent of the appraised property value in the proposed District may petition for the creation of a TIRZ. This allows private owners-developers to initiate creation of a District rather than depending on a city to do so.

- Second, the law allows taxing units within the zone, such as water districts, to negotiate on a case-by-case basis with the city the percentage (0 percent to 100 percent) of incremental tax revenue they will contribute to the fund. Nationally, one of the most significant criticisms of TIF has been that overlying districts are required to give up part of their tax revenue without having any say in how the money is spent. Texas law addresses this criticism.

- Third, in Texas, there are no onerous minimum requirements for finding blight within the zone and few other restrictions on what types of property can be incorporated. The Board of a TIRZ may expend TIF funds to pay the costs of replacement housing in or out of the zone, but if the project is city-initiated only 10 percent of the zone may be residential. Zones initiated by petition have to dedicate at least one-third of their areas to residential uses and one-third of their tax revenues to low-income housing in cities of 2.1 million people or more."

RESOURCE 3

More Texas Tax Increment Reinvestment Zones (TIRZ):

- City of Houston Tax Increment Reinvestment Zone: https://www.houstontx.gov/ecodev/tirz.html

- https://comptroller.texas.gov/economy/local/ch311/

- https://www.jonescarter.com/what-is-a-tirz-and-how-can-it-benefit-your-community/

RESOURCE 4

City of Chicago Multi-Family TIF Purchase-Rehab Program:

- https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/dcd/supp_info/multi-family-tif-purchase-rehab-program0.html

- https://www.nhschicago.org/purchase-assistance/TIFPR/

- https://www.chicagohomeless.org/city-media-advisory-sweet-home-chicagos-tif-purchase-rehab-program-celebrates-first-renovated-apartment-building/

- https://www.huduser.gov/portal/pdredge/pdr_edge_inpractice_011312.html

RESOURCE 5

State of Minnesota Housing TIF Districts

- https://www.house.leg.state.mn.us/hrd/issinfo/tif/hsgdist.aspx

- https://cms9files.revize.com/richfieldmn/Document_Center/Department/Community%20Development/TypesofTIFDistrictsfromEhl.pdf

RESOURCE 6

Affordable Housing Tax Increment Financing Program, State of Maine:

- https://www.nahb.org/-/media/NAHB/advocacy/docs/top-priorities/housing-affordability/case-study-maine.pdf

- https://www.mainehousing.org/programs-services/housing-development/developmentdetails/affordable-housing-tax-increment-financing-program

- https://portlandmaine.gov/DocumentCenter/View/27407/2020-Affordable-Housing-Tax-Increment-Financing-Application-

- From "Protecting Low Income Residents During Tax Increment Financing Redevelopment" by Kristen Erickson https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1047&context=law_journal_law_policy" "With few funding options available for cities to engage in redevelopment of poor communities, Tax Increment Financing provides a method for redevelopment that cities can

financially support. However, Tax Increment Financing can be used in ways that injure lower-income residents of those poor communities. Care must be taken that TIF projects are designed to meet the needs of those residents, to support them in moving out of poverty at the same time that the neighborhood itself is being lifted up. Cities should not ignore their lowest-income residents and force them from their communities in the name of urban redevelopment and revitalization."

RESOURCE 7

Transfer of Development Rights

- From Tax Increment Financing (TIF) Meets Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) by Duncan Greene (https://www.vnf.com/1850):

  "In 2011, the legislature passed legislation (ESSB 5253) that could facilitate the use of TIF in conjunction with Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) programs. TDR is a mechanism that allows landowners to transfer potential development rights from "sending areas" with lower population densities (such as farmland, forestland, and rural lands) to "receiving areas" with higher population densities. This transfer mechanism allows the landowner in the sending area to receive compensation for development that could have occurred on that land."

- From "Land Value Capture: Tools to Finance Our Urban Future," by Lourdes Germán and Allison Ehrich Bernstein:

  "Transfer of Development Rights Landowners pay a government entity a fee to transfer the density potential (as established in the local zoning law or ordinance) of one tract of land to a noncontiguous parcel of land that is better suited to greater densities. The fee generates revenue for public investment, and the transfer of density can also further urban planning objectives."

- See also:
  We Conserve PA: https://conservationtools.org/guides/12-transfer-of-development-rights

RESOURCE 8

Purchase of Development Rights

- From "Purchase of Development Rights Frequently Asked Questions" prepared

by Sheboygan County UW-Extension https://sheboygan.extension.wisc.edu/files/2010/05/Purchase-Develpment-Rights.pdf

"Property law in the United States establishes the concept that certain rights are attached to parcels of land, such as water, air and mineral rights, and the right to sell or develop the land. It is also generally accepted that these rights are distinct from one another and transferable. Under a PDR program, a landowner voluntarily sells the development rights to part or all of his or her land. The development rights are purchased by a government agency or trust, which pays the landowner the difference between the value of the undeveloped land and what it would be worth if it was developed. A conservation easement is drawn up and recorded on the property deed. This permanent easement forbids development in perpetuity, allowing only specified uses such as agriculture or open space. The land remains on the tax rolls and the landowner maintains all other rights and responsibilities for the land."

Equity and Inclusion

The City has already undertaken a research project with LEARN Missoula. We defer to that guide for specific recommendations.

Some other helpful resources include:

- The King County Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan: https://kingcounty.gov/elected/executive/equity-social-justice/strategic-plan.aspx

- Racial Equity Plan, City of Boulder: https://bouldercolorado.gov/racial-equity

- Erickson, Kristen. 2011. "Protecting Low Income Residents During Tax Increment Financing Redevelopment." Washington University Journal of Law & Policy, Vol. 36 https://openscholarship.wustl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1047&context=law_journal_law_policy

- Office of Equity and Human Rights, City of Portland: https://www.portlandoregon.gov/oehr/70046

- Planning for Social equity: https://www.lincolninst.edu/publications/articles/planning-social-equity

- Baltimore Green Network Plan. 2016.

www.baltimoresustainability.org/projects/green-network/

- City of Dallas. 2016. GrowSouth. www.dallasgrowsouth.com/year5presentation

- City of Dallas. 2015. *Neighborhood Revitalization Plan for Dallas*. June. www.dallascityhall.com/departments/pnv/DCH%20Documents/Neighborhood-Plus-June17-small.pdf

- Clayton, Mark and Regina Montoya. 2016. "Reducing the Epidemic of Poverty and Ending the Opportunity Gap." Mayor's Task Force on Poverty Briefing to the Dallas City Council. September 7. http://dallascityhall.com/government/Council%20Meeting%20Documents/b_reducing-the-epidemic-of-poverty-and-ending-the-opportunity-gap_combined_090716.pdf

- Pendall, Rolf with Carl Hedman. 2015. *Worlds Apart: Inequality between America's Most and Least Affluent Neighborhoods.* Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute. www.urban.org/sites/default/files/alfresco/publication-pdfs/2000288-Worlds-Apart-Inequality-between-Americas-Most-and-Least-Affluent-Neighborhoods.pdf

- PolicyLink Equitable Development Toolkit. 2014. www.policylink.org/equity-tools/equitable-development-toolkit/

TIF PROJECTS ORIGINATING FROM THE COMMUNITY

Many interviewees point out that currently, in order for TIF funds to be allocated to where community members think they are most needed, community members must convince the MRA, planners, and elected officials. They say that current design charrettes limit input to "a or b choices" rather than allowing those most affected by TIF-funded development to create and shape projects.

According to Tax Increment Financing and Economic Development by Craig L. Johnson and Kenneth A. Kriz, a community organization called Blocks Together formed in the West Humboldt Park neighborhood of Chicago to "tackle issues related to education, housing, economic justice, and the criminalization of youth." Frustrated by a lack of transparency about where how their tax dollars were being used and a belief that the "benefits of TIF were not being widely distributed," they "petitioned their alderman to reallocate $2million in TIF funding from a failed affordable housing project to a participatory process that would allow neighborhood residents and opportunity to decide how to spend the funds."

"With help from technical advisors in city government, a smaller group of representatives from the community worked in issue committees (e.g., safety, transportation, public art, and place making), narrowing down the list of project ideas and transforming the initial ideas into concrete, budgeted project proposals for the ballot. Residents then attended project expos where the representatives presented proposals for feedback. Finally, during three days in November 2014, residents voted on which projects to fund with the $2 million. A total of 292 residents. Took to the polls, selecting four winning projects: a project to pilot "green roofs" on top of four adjacent properties; a skate park; a culinary training institute started by a local restaurant; and a small business loan program for local entrepreneurs.

The MRA might consider a similar project or simply setting aside funds for community-based projects whereby individuals or organizations submit proposals for those funds.

THE EFFECT OF RISING PROPERTY TAXES ON PEOPLE WITH FIXED INCOMES

Many interviewees, even those who say that rising property taxes are a result of rising property values, admit that people on fixed incomes do not reap the benefit of such increases. This is particularly true for our senior community who are not viewing their homes as an investment.

Resources

- Senior Freeze
  Some states provide tax exemptions, deferrals, and other options including a "senior freeze" to help senior property owners keep their annual property tax bills within their fixed budgets. The senior freeze is a tax ceiling that guarantees property taxes will not go above the amount paid in the year that the homeowner qualifies for the program. Six states (Connecticut, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Texas) currently have property tax freeze programs. For more information, please see https://www.ncsl.org/research/fiscal-policy/state-property-tax-freezes-and-assessment-freezes.aspx.

TAXES

Many people believe that TIF causes their property taxes to go up.

Instead of arguing the nuances of whether rising taxes are caused by TIF, some interviewees suggest that the City address rising property taxes in other ways. Three methods were suggested.

Community Recommendations

- A local-option tax focused on tourism and luxury spending.

  As Gwen Jones stated in her Op-Ed from the Missoula Current:
  https://missoulacurrent.com/opinion/2019/07/gwen-jones-taxes/

  Property taxes are rising, not because local spending is out of control, but because our tax structure has not evolved with our changing economy. As a result, property taxes have become the work horse to fund local government. We need tax reform to modernize our tax structure… Our system has left local governments with the responsibility and burden of managing a flawed system. If we are going to be the backstop, then we should be given tools by the Legislature so we can broaden our tax base and find new money. This means being able to decide, as a community, if we want a local-option tax focused on tourism and luxury spending, which could stabilize budgets and provide property tax relief.

- A sales tax.

  The community wants things but there has to be a way to pay for them. And we say, we want them, and we say, we want to pay for them. And that's another way in which there's that public input, right? We want Fort Missoula free, we want evening and weekend Mountain Line and a new library and open space bonds. We want it all and we vote for it at the polls. So yeah, there may come a time when it's too much and I'm sure there are times when people are leaving Missoula to go live in smaller outlying communities, but generally that's not TIF that makes them do that.

- The gas tax that Missoulians voted for and the Montana Senate repealed. Many people feel that this battle should be fought in the courts.

TIF REFORM

This subject is on the minds of lots of council members and some in the community. Many people would like to see fundamental changes in policies related to the use of TIF.

Community Recommendations

- One suggestion that came up a lot was a cap or ceiling on the growth of TIF projects. Many, including a TIF critic on council, say that "it would be a good compromise." But others claim that it could be a problem if the state legislature changes the law and that it could prevent the flexibility of using TIF dollars for unforeseen projects.

And so, if they did something like put a cap on it, like they reached a certain amount, and that money went back to the tax base. That would be good.

We need to consider things like a cap. Right now, we're at 8.5% and so we are getting to a point where that might be a reasonable idea. MRA hates this idea. They (and some Council people) think it will take away the flexibility from MRA, but you can always change it. If there is a special project, you can go to Council and have it changed. If there were a cap, that extra money would go into the general fund, split like the rest. Also, we are at or close to a point where we cannot open any new URDs. If we had a cap, we might have more flexibility for blighted areas in other parts of the City.

- Some council and community members also suggest changing the percentages that the MRA pays for things like deconstruction.

It would be a good conversation for the Board about maybe limiting how much MRA pays for deconstruction."

- And some suggest that the MRA/City should get ownership of deconstructed materials if it pays for the deconstruction, say some interviewees. This would, they say, offset costs for the taxpayers if they sell them or re-use them on other projects. Alternatively, they say, the City could "make contractors factor the sale of salvaged materials into their bids."

Resources

- Tax Increment Financing and Economic Development, Craig L Johnson and Kenneth A. Kraz

Surplus TIF revenues should not be allowed to accumulate in TIF funds; rather, they should be returned to overlapping taxing districts promptly.

To address this perception of surplus hoarding, statutes in half of state require districts to return excess incremental revenues to overlapping jurisdictions each year that they are generated.

LACK OF CITY COUNCIL INVOLVEMENT

- The biggest concern that supporters on City Council have with the TIF process is that they don't see projects until they are basically a done deal. While they have great trust and respect for the MRA and the MRA Board, they note that sometimes projects come up for a vote that could benefit from earlier input from Council. Many Council members say that better and earlier communication could solve this issue, but some also suggest a change in process to ensure that MRA and City Council goals and objectives are always aligned:

Maybe some trip wires around policy would be helpful.

- Council members are also concerned about public engagement. Most council members agree that it is important to get community "buy-in" by involving the public much earlier in the process:

> *We need to use a format where the public can be involved earlier in a project so we can tweak it. We need to ask things like, "how will it affect you?" "Where are the holes?" "What are the consequences?" "What are the trade-offs that we're going to all have to make to make this work?" and just give them (the community) their chance to say no, but more importantly, a chance to present another solution. My hunch is that most people don't have something else. So that will help them see MRA's perspective.*

- Another suggestion was to use Council as a communications tool:

> *Use council as a communication tool. Create resolutions that spell out the use of the funds, e.g., the first 1/3 to ½ of a URD, the priority is on priming the pump with the private sector. Following that, these are the priorities housing, infrastructure that improves the quality of life, et cetera, et cetera. Community of Missoula: once we get that pump primed, this is where the money is going to go.*

Resources

- The City of Chicago developed a multi-year capital budget that incorporated TIF District spending then submitted that capital budget to the city council for approval.

  From the Chicago TIF Reform Panel, "Findings and Recommendations for Reforming the Use of Tax Increment Financing in Chicago: Creating Greater Efficiency, Transparency and Accountability." https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/mayor/Press%20Room/Press%20Releases/2011/August/8.29.11TIFReport.pdf

  "Allocate Resources. The City should create a multi-year Capital Budget that is then submitted to City Council for consideration. The Capital Budget should detail the funding of City infrastructure needs, including those articulated in the Economic Development Plan. All TIF infrastructure allocations and porting decisions should be made in accordance with the Capital Budget."

CUSTOMER SERVICE THROUGHOUT THE CITY

Almost everyone who was interviewed made a correlation between public dissatisfaction with government and public dissatisfaction with TIF. If someone has had a bad experience with any government entity, they tend to "lump" all State, County, and City services together.

Community Recommendations

The City needs a better user experience like how Parks and Recreation thinks about people enjoying parks. Right now, the user experience is not great in all departments and people are getting frustrated. Then they hate government. And then that translates to hating MRA and hating TIF. One bad user experience in any City department makes everything suffer.

The City should hold itself accountable for good customer service. We should always be reviewing processes to see if they are user-friendly.

This is obviously something that the MRA cannot address directly. However, a concerted effort by all City departments to focus on and improve customer service would help the MRA as well as all other departments. There is no greater communications tool in Missoula than word of mouth and improved user experience is the best way to create positive feelings for the public.

Resources

- McKinsey & Company studied customer-experience across federal, state, and local governments and found that "customer satisfaction with an experience is directly linked to customer loyalty." They also admit that "Government agencies have considerable ground to make up in building a more citizen-centric culture." They discovered "Six hallmarks of best-in-class customer-experience practitioners that can guide improvement efforts."

  You can find their findings and suggestions here:
  https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-and-social-sector/our-insights/improving-the-customer-experience-to-achieve-government-agency-goals#

CITY PLANNING

Developers keep pointing back to issues with the planning department. They talk of delays and "fiefdoms" and arbitrary decisions. The City has recently restructured the department to address some of these issues, but the issues of planning and development came up often with multiple interviewees.

Community Recommendations

- Interviewees suggest an outside consultant come in and help "clean house."

> "There are a couple of things. I think it's a legacy problem. Meaning it's a department that probably wasn't under as much pressure as it has been of late with just the sheer amount of volume. I think there's a lot of fiefdoms within that department, particularly on the inspector side where it's power for them to be able to make your life miserable. And you know, as hard as that is to say, I think it's totally true. I saw it play out in my own situation. And I think that, I think that like, it's one of those things like, what do they call them when they go and restart a company where basically you have to have somebody who's not of that place, come in, clean house, set procedures, set protocols, and then somebody can enforce it? I'm not sure it can be an inside job. Quite honestly. I think it has to probably have somebody who's just got the mandate to clean house and get things done and lay out exactly how it should roll.

- Interviewees also talked about bad or outdated rules like the ADU regulations in Missoula.

- Another suggestion was to follow Portland's ADU policy

> "Portland's backyard, ADU laws are the best in the nation. And if you want to get housing, like where it actually should be, which isn't like someplace up against the highway, but basically sprinkled throughout town and everybody's backyard, we fix the ADU laws and we use that TIF money to help people put additional housing in and around where it makes the most sense, which is in the neighborhood, of course.

Resources

- City of Portland: "Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU)Permits
  https://www.portland.gov/bds/residential-permitting/residential-building-permits/adu-permits

- Dwell Magazine: "Everything You Need To Know About building An ADU in Portland, Oregon"
  https://www.dwell.com/guide/adu-building-guide-portland-oregon-5483109d

- Accessory Dwellings: "How Portland Became ADU-Friendly (And How Your City Can, Too)
  https://accessorydwellings.org/2016/03/04/how-portland-became-adu-friendly/

INCENTIVIZE LOCAL AND MINORITY DEVELOPERS

- Many interviewees questioned whether there was a way to incentivize local and minority developers:

> *Is there a way to create different criteria for a local business/smaller developer to make TIF more accessible to people who aren't already int the game? And some way of making it a little bit more inclusive to maybe like smaller, more local entities? Like we added for public works contracts at the City a little bit of a weight in the scoring system for local contractors. People don't apply, but at the same time, it isn't like a competition, like a request for proposals, I think that would be challenging because you aren't evaluating projects against each other. You're evaluating one project at a time, but maybe they have slightly different creative thresholds that they have to meet if they're local or something.*

- Along those same lines, some suggest that the MRA consider a point system for projects that align with community values:

"*Maybe process reform-wise, most opportunities to receive money have some kind of a call for proposal and some kind of a timeline and some kind of a public meeting. It just feel like there's sort of this first-in-the-door kind of thing with MRA that maybe, if you really are in some blighted old drive-in movie theater kind of area, you might want to take whatever you can get, but I think we can be really choosy. If you had a LEED building or something where you could have points around things that make our community impact bigger, you get points for on-site childcare or you get points for whatever it might be, and then you just score based on that point system…As an extreme example, we're not going to give TIF to build a private prison in town. That's not going to be in-line with our community objectives. And so maybe we just have to define what our community objectives are and maybe there's some scoring based around "how does this contribute to community objectives" and not "I applied in January and you applied in March, so you're out of luck.*

LIVING WAGE

Some interviewees would like to see the MRA "forbid Tax Increment Financing from being used on projects that were not going to perpetually pay a living wage."

Resources

- Minneapolis Code of Ordinances, Chapter 38 "Living Wage and Responsible Public Spending Regulations"
  https://library.municode.com/mn/minneapolis/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COOR_TIT2AD_CH38LIWAREPUSPRE

NEIGHBORHOOD COMMUNITY REAL ESTATE INVESTMENT TRUSTS

Many interviewees brought up the idea of Neighborhood Community Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITS) to approach development and build wealth for people in neighborhoods.

Community Recommendations

■ From a report commissioned by NMCDC by Sarah Kester of Missoula for NMCDC:

" *An innovative approach to community development which fosters equitable wealth building through commercial real estate is gaining interest across the country. Neighborhood or Community Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) allow individuals and families from low to moderate income brackets to build assets through a shared investment in commercial property. Investors, who are also neighborhood residents, can build equity through a nominal investment and gain short-term dividends and long-term returns through annual share price change. Neighborhood or Community REITs are different from other types of community development initiatives in that the residents who are too often displaced by revitalization are given an opportunity to build wealth through it. This approach aligns well with the strategies we are utilizing to help overcome our affordable housing issues here in Missoula. Providing housing is a single piece of the puzzle, helping to build wealth for the underserved residents is another. A neighborhood investment opportunity gives renters and those with no- or low-financial assets a deserving and sustained financial stake in the changes happening in their neighborhood. Ownership changes neighborhoods and can allow people to not just survive but thrive. Now more than ever, Neighborhood REITs could provide a significant impact on the overall health of our community, as we search for an equitable and just recovery plan from the setbacks of COVID-19.*

An inspiring Neighborhood REIT known as the Community Investment Trust (CIT) in Portland, Oregon has created and licensed a toolkit product, offered along with the expertise of the organization, for neighborhoods and communities looking to replicate their model. Their program offers a safe, inclusive and affordable real estate opportunity that helps families and individuals build assets and resilience while strengthening the overall community. According to the CIT, 68% of investors revealed their civic engagement has increased since investing, fostering improved neighborhoods that better characterize the interests of all residents. Additionally, the CIT is helping preserve local ownership and business growth while affordability is retained.

Similar to the CIT, Nico is a neighborhood investment company that makes it possible for people who love their neighborhood build a long-term financial stake in their community by investing in local real estate. Nico was started as a way to help those who have been left out of earning wealth created within their own neighborhoods. Located in Echo Park neighborhood in the City of Los Angeles, Nico is both a REIT and a Public Benefit Corporation meaning they are committed to pursuing positive social and environmental outcomes as well as shareholder profit. With the help of community surveys they've identified five areas where to concentrate their impact: increased financial inclusion and wealth creation, distributed power and stakeholder alignment, improved environment and quality of life, neighborhood diversity and stability, and a strong local economy. The organization is comprised of three distinct entities: Nico Asset

Management LLC, which stewards investments; Nico Property Management LLC, which oversees the buildings; and Nico Services, an interface with residents.

Resources

- Community Investment Trust (Portland, Oregon): https://investcit.com/

- Neighborhood Investment Company (NICO, Echo Park): https://mynico.com/

CHANGE THE STRUCTURE OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD COUNCILS

Many interviewees pointed out that, by charter, the neighborhood councils are not meant to do real community engagement. Most interviewees like the idea of having a dedicated City engagement department and/or person in addition to the neighborhood councils. A few interviewees, however, suggest a more comprehensive change.

Community Recommendations

- Follow the lead of Seattle and disband neighborhood councils in favor of local organizing groups.

In Seattle they have moved away from the city mandated neighborhood organizations, like the neighborhood councils. They're peppered in, throughout the different neighborhoods. In Seattle they've taken that piece of funding that is associated with those groups and put it into the hands of organizing groups and then those groups perform the function of the neighborhood leadership team and do that engagement. As a result of that, they actually pay neighbors to knock doors and engage other neighbors so it's an employment opportunity for neighbors, as well as legit engagement.

Resources

- https://www.seattle.gov/neighborhoods

APPENDICES

ACTION LIST

CLEAR GOALS, PRIORITIES & METRICS

- Create a detailed strategic plan with community input

- Create an infographic that clearly shows the goals

- Put the goals/priorities on the website and use in collateral and presentations

- Create graphic icons for each priority

TRANSPARENT, ACCESSIBLE & COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNICATION FOUNDATIONS

- Put the "why" first every time and always lead with community benefit

- Always work to paint a broader picture that is accessible to all

- Shift the mindset

- Minimize or eliminate acronyms and jargon in public communication

- Create detailed interactive maps

- Provide more data

- Make every possible document public

- Give all data complete context

- Put the statute governing TIF on website with explanation

- Designate one person to explain the MRA and its use of TIF to the public

- Use neighborhood names instead of numbers

- Refer to projects as MRA projects instead of TIF projects

- Change the name of projects to be more explicit about the public benefit

- Keep all communication simple

- Don't use the term "economic development."

- Clearly explain the concepts of "blight" and "but for" and how they are used in determining the feasibility of projects.

- Create printed and digital pieces about blight and the but...for clause

- Create different versions of information based on the target audience

- Collect and use data as often as possible

- Consider having an economist do a "definitive objective study" on the long-term benefits of TIF-funded projects

- Consider an impact study from the developer's side

MESSAGING

- Start by acknowledging shortcomings

- Always go back to your goals and priorities

- Create messages of inspiration

WEBSITE

- Create a more user-friendly website that allows for storytelling and more dynamic content

- Follow Information Architecture suggestions in the appendices

- Follow Web Content Accessibility Guidelines

- Make website welcoming and explicit in the MRA's commitment to diversity and equality including a land acknowledgment

- Follow suggestions from LEARN Missoula

- Link project pages to Engage Missoula

MEDIA STRATEGY

- Build a relationship with reporters

- Establish a point person

- Have one-on-one in person meetings with reporters

- Call reporters on a weekly basis

- Create key talking points for every project

- Create a press kit

- Create a press release for every project

- Follow the news to anticipate issues and opportunities

LEVEL ONE TACTICS

- Create cover sheets for Board memos

- Create long, medium, short version of Board minutes

- Create case studies for all projects

- Use Fillable PDF in Appendix "Case Study Collection Form Example" on page 146 to gather information for case studies

- Get consent at beginning of projects for signage and photography

- Get high-resolution photography and video for each project

- Create clear internal systems for keeping all staff up-to-date

- Create signage for all projects

- Design multiple sign types

- Create a general brochure

- Create a TIF specific brochure

- Create a Key Projects brochure

- Create an "in the weeds" brochure

- Create a two-sided card detailing the legal statue governing the MRA's use of TIF

- Create a general slide presentation

- Create a TIF specific slide presentation

- Create a Key Projects slide presentation

- Create a comprehensive slide presentation

- Create a general map for the TIF index page that shows all the URDs

- Create interactive maps for each URD

- Create video maps for development in each District

- Create video map of sidewalks in Missoula funded by TIF

- Create a communications packet for elected officials

- Address the County tax bill

- Create listing on Engage Missoula for all projects

- Create tools for partners

- Update City Council members

SOCIAL MEDIA

- Secure handles, establish channels, select aggregate site

- Collect photos and videos

- Create first campaign assign roles and responsibilities, and create posting calendar

- Engage, comment, and plan next campaign

- Update the MRA's Facebook page

- Create Instagram account

- Create Twitter account

- Follow other community individuals and organizations

LEVEL TWO TACTICS

- Create one video for each MRA priority

- Create case studies of high profile and controversial projects

- Create a series of animated educational videos

- Create a monthly newsletter

- Contribute to other organization's newsletters

- Collect emails on the website

- Use MailChimp

- Track which newsletters are most often read

- Work with other organization's communications teams

- Create a digital and print annual report

- Consider quarterly reports

- Have Board members present to City departments

- Involve Board member in community planning

- Have Board members reach out to members of the community

- Enlist Board members to write op-eds and letters to the editor

- Find speaking opportunities for Board members

- Have press training for all Board members

- Support Board member house parties

- Set up interviews for Board members on morning shows

- Create a detailed spreadsheet of all supporters

- Post and comment on Next Door app

AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Change the mindset

- Review excerpts from community organizers in Appendix <u>"Community Engagement in Missoula" on page 169</u>

- Proactively create ways to meet with different segments of the community on a regular basis

- Actively listen and respond to community members

- Address concerns raised by the community

- Involve the community in setting goals and priorities

- Provide easy access to information for the community

- Create capacity

- Be inclusive in all forms of engagement

- Build and maintain trusting relationships

- Increase access to facilities and services

- Provide diverse opportunities to get involved

- Define where and how the public can influence decisions

- Identify populations directly and indirectly affected by City projects

- Define roles for all stakeholders

- Create a detailed engagement plan

- Identify any outside needs like translators or consultants

- Ask for information from other groups currently doing engagement work

- Reach out to community organizers to create two-way exchanges of information

- Create a City communications and community engagement department

- Identify all target groups in Missoula

- Reach out to organizations who are already tied to or providing services with those communities

- Reach out to individuals in leadership roles

- Go to venues to find community members

- Define constraints to public input on MRA projects

- Define objectives for involving public in process.

- Have community engagement team work with all consultants

- Work with the Office of Neighborhoods

- Regularly check in with residents

- Have Board members attend community meetings

- Create a database of people in each District to invite to community engagement events

- Gamify the education of TIF in the community

Project

Deconstruction at XYZ Maple St.
[actions being funded]
[street address]

URD

Name of neighborhood, e.g. Riverfront Triangle

Date January 1, 2021 | **Presented by** Staff Member Name

Public Benefit

Why is this project important for the public good? This project benefits the Missoula community by… Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis. Sed diam quam, congue bibendum lacinia vel, hendrerit sed nunc. Cras pretium sem ex, id tempor augue scelerisque ut. Nulla sit amet est turpis. Mauris vestibulum ullamcorper mollis. Nunc fringilla, purus ac interdum aliquam, erat nunc ornare est, aliquet placerat libero lorem non nisl. Nullam eget nisi non felis ullamcorper pretium et ac dolor. Vivamus sagittis scelerisque orci, in dignissim nunc cursus tempor. Quisque sit amet purus ac orci bibendum cursus.

MRA Priority

Which MRA priority/priorities is this project furthering? This project furthers the MRA priority of… Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis. Sed diam quam, congue bibendum lacinia vel, hendrerit sed nunc. Cras pretium sem ex, id tempor augue scelerisque ut. Nulla sit amet est turpis.

Relevant Plans

Which City/neighborhood plans/initiatives is this project supporting and how? This project supports the following plans (and it does so by)… Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis. Sed diam quam, congue bibendum lacinia vel, hendrerit sed nunc. Cras pretium sem ex, id tempor augue scelerisque ut. Nulla sit amet est turpis.

Project Description

What is this project? Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis. Sed diam quam, congue bibendum lacinia vel, hendrerit sed nunc. Cras pretium sem ex, id tempor augue scelerisque ut. Nulla sit amet est turpis. Mauris vestibulum ullamcorper mollis. Nunc fringilla, purus ac interdum aliquam, erat nunc ornare est, aliquet placerat libero lorem non nisl. Nullam eget nisi non felis ullamcorper pretium et ac dolor. Vivamus sagittis scelerisque orci, in dignissim nunc cursus tempor. Quisque sit amet purus ac orci bibendum cursus.

Costs to the MRA

What exactly is the MRA paying for on this project? Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis.

REIMBURSEMENT

At the conclusion of the project, the MRA will be reimbursing XYZ developer for $X for the following improvements for public benefit… Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis.

- ▪ Request 1 e.g., "Remediation & Deconstruction" $X,XXX,XXX.00
- ▪ Request 2 e.g., "Right of Way Improvements" $X,XXX,XXX.00

Public/Private Investment

What are the public and private investment on this project? Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum.

- ▪ MRA Investment with TIF: $X,XXX,XXX.00
- ▪ Private Investment: $X,XXX,XXX.00
- ▪ Ratio of Public to Private Investment: X

The But-For Test

What is the "but…for…" statement on this project? This development would not happen solely through private investment in the reasonably foreseeable future because… Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis.

In addition, the MRA calculates that the net increase in market value for this site would be $X compared to $X revenue from likely development that would occur without MRA investment. Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis.

Return on Investment

Can the MRA/City afford this project? What will be the return on investment (ROI) of this project? Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis.

The MRA calculates that this investment will yield $X in annual property taxes starting in XXXX. The MRA estimates that the City will recoup its initial investment in XXXX. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis.

Relevant Past Projects

Estimated Increment with and without Project

The estimated increment with and without the project are… Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis.

Opportunity Costs

What are the opportunity costs of this project? The opportunity costs of this project are… Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum. Nullam justo arcu, condimentum vitae lorem et, vulputate suscipit neque. Ut efficitur eget arcu quis convallis.

Financial Instrument and Hierarchy of Bonds (senior, par, subordinate)

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- Consectetur adipiscing elit
- Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet, rutrum id ipsum.

District Sunset Date with and without Project Bonds

January 1, 2021

Percent of District Capacity Represented by the Funding

XX%

Annual Debt Service

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Bond Term

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Example of medium version of minutes based on Board Minutes from February 26, 2021

Condensed Board Meeting Minutes
February 26, 2021

A Regular meeting of the Board of Commissioners of the Missoula Redevelopment Agency was held on Friday, February 26, 2021 via Zoom at 12:00 p.m. Those in attendance were as follows:

Board:
Karl Englund, Nancy Moe, Ruth Reineking, Melanie Brock, Tasha Jones

Staff:
Ellen Buchanan, Chris Behan, Annette Marchesseault, Jilayne Dunn, Lesley Pugh

Public:
William Parnell, Anderson Zurmuehlen; Jan Schweitzer, Anderson Zurmuehlen; Aaron McDonough, 3100 Brooks Street; Jeff Maphis, JCM Architecture P.C.; David Erickson, Missoulian; Jan Van Fossen, Citizen; Nick Caras, Union Block Restoration; David Gray, DVG Architecture & Planning; Gwen Jones, City Council; Missoula Access Community Television (MCAT)

Call To Order

12:00 p.m.

Approval Of Minutes

January 21, 2021 Regular Board Meeting Minutes were approved as submitted.

Public Comments And Announcements

Englund said the Board would not be voting on the County Elections Office as reported in the press. It is not on the agenda and the application is not ready for MRA to act on.

Reineking said the Missoulian had a nice article on the DJ&A project on Maple Street.

Action Items

FY20 Audit – Request for Acceptance (Dunn)

Dunn introduced William Parnell and Jan Schweitzer, auditors with Anderson Zurmeuhlen (AZ). Parnell thanked the staff at MRA. He said MRA staff was very professional, helpful and resourceful during the 100% remote engagement which was a first for AZ and MRA. The Fiscal Year 2020 (FY20) Audit was conducted to review the Agency's financial statements to ensure that they are accurate and in compliance with accounting regulations. In AZ's opinion, the financial statements and all material respects are in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States. Parnell said there were no significant presentation changes or new accounting pronouncements adopted in FY20. AZ is happy to say they encountered no significant difficulties or disagreements in dealing with management in performing and completing their audit. Professional standards require AZ to accumulate all known and likely mis-statements identified during the audit, other than those that are clearly trivial, and communicate them to the appropriate level of management. Parnell was happy to say no such misstatements were noted during the FY20 audit. He said the financial statement highlights are provided in detail starting at page five. Parnell said he was happy to answer any questions.

Moe asked how long MRA needs to keep reporting Urban Renewal District I (URD). Dunn said she and Parnell discussed that. They want to make sure they have protocol in place and so they are going to discuss it and close it out this Fiscal Year so MRA doesn't have to report it any more. Englund asked if it is a Board decision. Dunn said it can be. She said the Tax Increment Financing (TIF) mechanism has expired under State Law, but the District itself has not expired. They let the District continue to exist so MRA could collect delinquent taxes. A few years back the County wrote off a lot of their debt that had been out there for several years. Dunn said MRA hasn't seen any more delinquent tax collections for URD I in

several years. Englund asked if the Board needs to close it officially in order for MRA to no longer have it audited. Dunn said that is a great idea and would add closure to it.

Moe moved to accept the FY20 audit report.

Jones seconded the motion.

No further discussion. No public comment.

Motion passed unanimously (5 ayes, 0 nays).

3100 Brooks Street (URD III) – FIP Request (Marchesseault)

Marchesseault said MRA received a request for Façade Improvement Program (FIP) assistance for the building located at 3100 Brooks Street. It is owned by Dr. Aaron McDonough, Align Properties LLC. The current building was built in the 1970s and has three units. It currently houses Papa John's Pizza and Rod-da Paint, while the western unit is vacant. Dr. McDonough is proposing to convert that vacant unit into his orthodontic practice. He currently has 10 employees and expects to add six more over the next three years at the 3100 Brooks Street location.

Marchesseault said the overall façade work is a little over $400,000. A $50,000 FIP grant would equate to 12.5% of that. The FIP program allows for grants of up to 25% of the total project cost, or $50,000, whichever is less. This request falls within that.

Jones moved the MRA board approve a façade improvement program grant to align properties llc in an amount not to exceed $50,000 for exterior renovation of the build-ing located at 3100 brooks street, pending final design excellence review and other city permit approvals, and with the stipulation that reimbursement will be made at the conclusion of the project under submission of required lien releases and proof of expenditures, and authorize the chair to sign the development agreement.

Brock seconded the motion.

No further discussion. No public comment.
Motion passed unanimously (5 ayes, 0 nays).

Union Block Restoration

127 East Main Street (Front Street URD) – Second TIF Request for Historic Façade Renovation (Behan)

Behan showed photos of the building's former condition and how it looks today with the work that has been done to date. The building owner, Nick Caras, and his architect, David Gray with DVG Architecture and Planning, found old renderings of the original building before it was covered up in the 1950s and wanted to restore it to its original state. During the building uncovering it was determined that most of the façade should be intact, with some guesses on how to move forward. After a month of peering under panels and removing interior walls and finding the rendering, they found that the building was a Queen Anne style that was constructed in 1900. It incorporated materials different than anywhere else in the downtown and that were brought in from around the country.

Behan said if this is considered and approved, a total assistance package would be $704,858. This amount is roughly similar to what went into The Wilma and the Florence Hotel over a period of years and several projects. Behan emailed the Board a list of items staff put together to help differentiate façade renovation of landmark historical buildings from other kinds of projects that have asked for additional assistance, such as forgetting to include demolition costs, utility extensions, and so forth.

Buchanan said it sounds like if this is not approved there will be sub-standard materials used for some of the restoration. The authenticity of the restoration would be compromised with respect to the two items they didn't anticipate.

Brock moved the Board approve an MRA pledge up to $125,000 for additional eligible façade improvements based on the following contingencies: Reimbursement would be based on paid invoices with contactor lien waivers for eligible activities. Within an amended development agreement, the owner shall agree that reimbursement of approved additional eligible items may, at MRA's sole discretion.

Reineking seconded the motion.

No further discussion. No public comment.

Motion passed unanimously (5 ayes, 0 nays).

Non-Action Items

Proceed Without Prejudice Policy

Buchanan said this was not pressing and could be discussed at the next Board meeting.

Public Comment on Agendas

Dunn said this is an information item for the Board. There is a public comment option on eSCRIBE where the public can go to the agenda, click on an item, and leave a comment. The Board can view the comments on the agenda. Staff wanted to let the Board know it is now an option. It is currently used by City Council and other committee meetings. Staff wanted to know when the Board would like to cut off the time for public comment so they have time to review comments before the Board meeting. Englund said if the comments get cut off the day of the meeting that should give enough time for the Board to review them beforehand. Dunn added that public comments become part of the permanent record on eSCRIBE.

March Board Meeting

The regularly scheduled meeting was moved out one week to March 25th.

Staff Reports

Director's Report

Buchanan asked the Board to read the item in her report on the Street Reconfiguration Projects. She said it is pretty exciting.

She said there are still several empty bills at the Legislature about TIF that are currently placeholders. Two bills have been introduced that are not onerous nor do they have any adverse effect on what MRA does. The statewide group and League of Cities and Towns do not plan on objecting to those two bills, but have gotten commitment from the bill sponsors that if people try to make amendments to those bills or change them they will just withdraw them. Englund said the placeholders are dead on Wednesday unless something extraordinary happens or unless they are appropriation bills. He said one of the things this Legislature has done is change the transmittal date for appropriation bills.

Brock asked for a staff report on the Railroad Quiet Zone Study at the next Board meeting.

FY21 Budget Reports

Dunn said all of the tax increment is up to date. Debt service funds have been filled. All of the projects that have been approved by the MRA Board through last month were added to the reports.

Dunn noted there were some excess funds from the North Reserve-Scott Street Series 2017 bond that related to Phase 2 and 3 of the Scott Street Village project. Those funds were allocated to Public Infrastructure Improvements and staff is working with the City to figure those out. MRA was unable to expend those funds in the time period allowed with the bond, so staff is doing a call on a partial redemption on that bond. That will be effective March 1, 2021.

West Broadway Corridor Master Plan

Marchesseault said there was a kick-off meeting last week. The consultants are putting together an interactive website and expect to have a Virtual Design Charrette in early April. The project should wrap up this fall.

Committee Reports

Other Items

Adjournment

Adjourned at 2:08 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lesley Pugh

Lesley Pugh

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Moe moved to accept the FY20 audit report.

Jones seconded the motion.

No further discussion. No public comment.

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Jones moved the MRA Board approve a façade improvement program grant to Align properties, LLC in an amount not to exceed $50,000 for exterior renovation of the building.

Brock seconded the motion.

No further discussion. No public comment.

Motion passed unanimously (5 ayes, 0 nays).

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Reineking seconded the motion.

No further discussion. No public comment.

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Lesley Pugh

Lesley Pugh

MRA
Missoula Redevelopment Agency

Case Study Collection Form

Name of Project
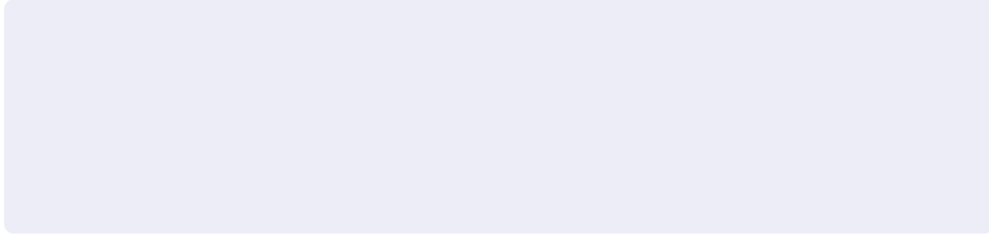
Name of URD where project is located

Public benefit of project

MRA priority the project furthered
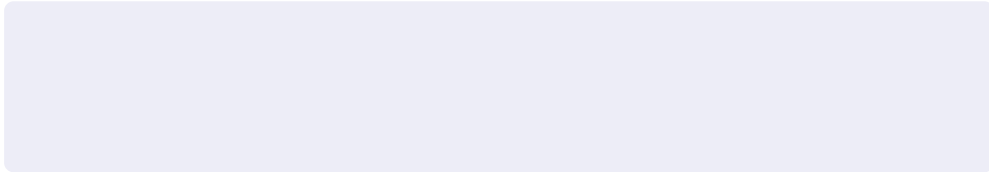
Relevant plans the project addressed
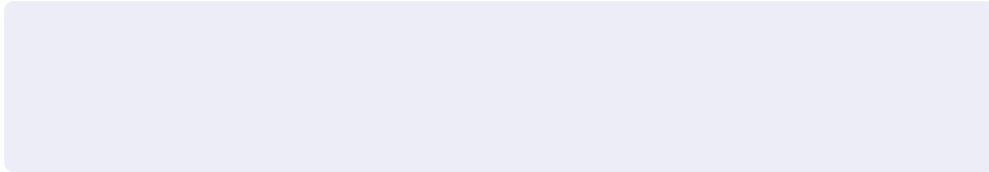
Project Description

Before, during and after photos of project

Please gather and include these photos when submitting the Collection Form to be placed into the Case Study Template.
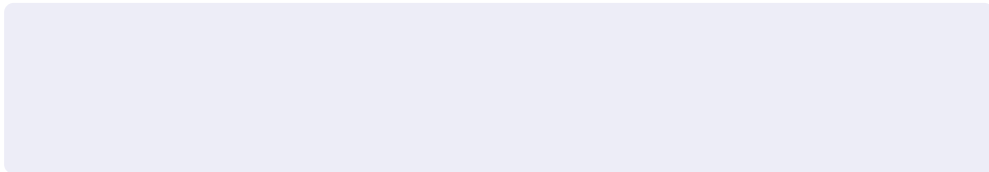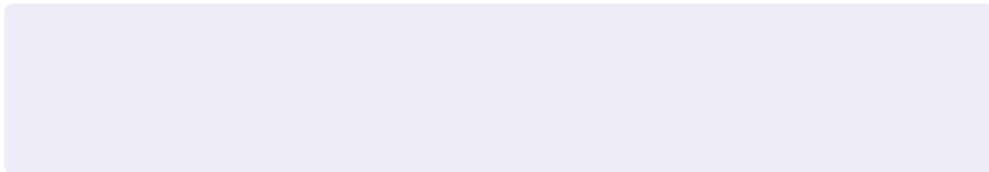
Quote from developer

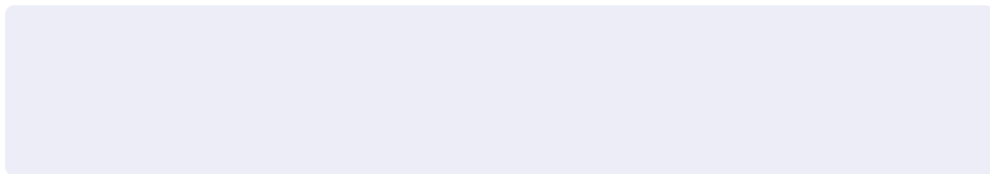## Quote from community member

Quote from City Council member

Costs to MRA

The But-For test

Return on investment

Opportunity costs

Infographics and icons

Please gather and include any inforgraphics and icons when submitting the Collection Form to be placed into the Case Study Template.

Signed approval from property owner for signage and photos

Please include when submitting the Collection Form to be placed into the Case Study Template.

Has a photographer been assigned?

○ Yes   ○ No

Has a videographer been assigned?

○ Yes   ○ No

Name of Project

Name of URD where project is located

Public Benefit

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Project Description

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MRA PRIORITY ACCOMPLISHED

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DISTRICT PRIORITY ACCOMPLISHED

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RELEVANT PLANS THE PROJECT ADDRESSED

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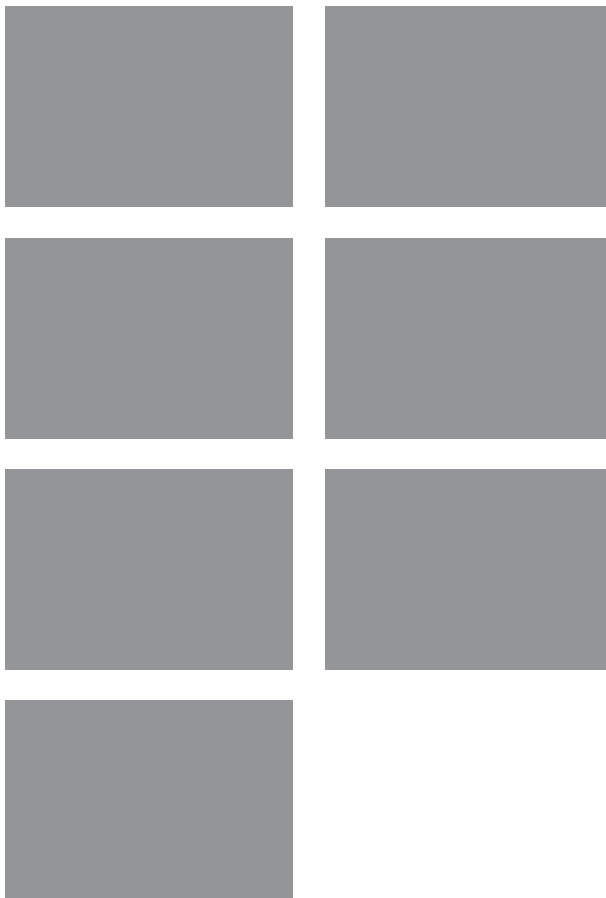
WOULD NOT HAVE HAPPENED WITHOUT TIF FUNDING

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Photos of the Project

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COSTS TO MRA

▪ $XXX,XXX

THE BUT-FOR-TEST

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RETURN ON INVESTMENT

▪ $XXX,XXX Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.

OPPORTUNITY COSTS

▪ $XXX,XXX Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.

▪ $XXX,XXX Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit.

cont.

FROM THE DEVELOPER

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— *Jane Doe*

FROM COMMUNITY MEMBER

"Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet. Ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet."
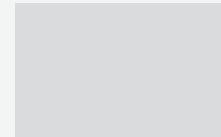
— *Jane Doe*

FROM CITY COUNCIL MEMBER

"Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet. Ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Proin elit lorem, lacinia non scelerisque sit amet."
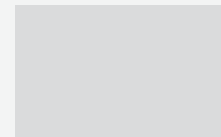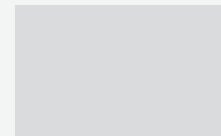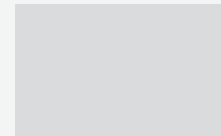
— *Jane Doe*

ICON / INFOGRAPHIC 1

ICON / INFOGRAPHIC 2 LOREM IPSUM

ICON / INFOGRAPHIC 3

ICON / INFOGRAPHIC 4 DOLOR SIT AMET LOREM IPSUM SIT
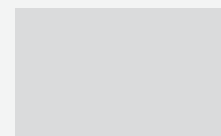
ICON / INFOGRAPHIC 5

WEBSITE SITE MAP

1.0 Home

- 6.0 News/Press
  - 6.2 For the Press
  - 6.1 Latest News Index
- 5.0 Who We Are
  - 5.0.4 History
  - 5.0.3 Staff
    - 5.0.3.1 Individual Staff/Director page
  - 5.0.2 Board
    - 5.0.2.1 Individual Board member page
  - 5.0.1 Agendas, Meetings & Records (Index/Archives)
    - 5.0.1.3 Resources
    - 5.0.1.2 Records
    - 5.0.1.1 Agendas & Meetings
- 4.0 Other Services
  - 4.5 Our Projects
    - 4.5.1 Individual Project Page
  - 4.4 Commercial Rehabilitation Loan Program (Description and Application Guidelines)
  - 4.2 Façade Improvement (Description and Application Guidelines)
  - 4.1 Code Compliance Program (Description and Application Guidelines)
- 3.0 Tax Increment Financing (Link to URDs)
  - 3.5 Application Guidelines
  - 3.4 FAQs
  - 3.3 How it Works
  - 3.2 TIF Projects (Index w/ Filters)
    - 3.2.1 Individual Project Page
  - 3.2 URDS Index Page
    - 3.2.1 Individual URDS pages
  - 3.1 Urban Renewal Districts (Overview)
- 2.0 Priorities
  - 2.1 Objectives

WEBSITE CONTENT OUTLINE

- **1.0 HOME**
    - » Who we are line with "connect with us" button
    - » Priorities with short copy and "read our strategic plan" button
    - » Get involved section with:
        - • Link to next meeting
        - • Link to next meeting agenda
        - • Link to last meeting minutes
    - » Featured Project that links to case study
    - » Interactive Map
    - » Footer
        - • About us
        - • Land Acknowledgment
        - • Diversity statement
        - • Newsletter signup
        - • Social media links
- **2.0 PRIORITIES**
    - » Explanation of priorities and how they were determined
    - » Link to strategic plan
    - » Link to the Montana Urban Renewal Statue
    - » List of things that can and cannot be done with TIF (infographic)
- **2.1 OBJECTIVES**
    - » Details of objectives from strategic plan with infographics

- **3.0 TAX INCREMENT FINANCING (Link to URDs)**

  - » Brief description

  - » Community-facing checklist for projects

  - » General data/infographic

  - » Current active projects

  - » Dashboard with key performance indicators

- **3.1 URBAN RENEWAL DISTRICTS (Overview)**

  - » Maps of Missoula with all URDs

  - » What is a URD

  - » How is a URD formed, who determines boundaries, etc.

  - » Video

- **3.2 URDS INDEX PAGE**

- **3.2.1 INDIVIDUAL URDS PAGES**

  - » Interactive map of District that shows neighborhood before and then each development and how it changed the neighborhood (not just MRA developments). Then see if community need has shifted

  - » Priorities

  - » An easy to access quick history of the District that includes, how it came about, what the priorities are, what we have funded and why and how they work for the greater good of the community.

  - » How much was funded in URD

  - » Estimated ROI of URD

  - » Relevant plans with context (e.g. current site "What is a Master Plan" om the current N Reserve page.)

  - » Case studies

  - » When formed/when expires

- » History of projects in district

- » Applications

- » Videos

- **3.2 TIF PROJECTS (Index w/ Filters)**

  - » Current & Past projects

  - » Filter by

    - • Type of project

    - • Date

    - • URD

    - • Key priority

    - • Money spent

- **3.2.1 INDIVIDUAL PROJECT PAGE**

  - » Name

  - » Name of URD where located

  - » Public benefit of project

  - » MRA priority the project furthered with icons

  - » District priority the project furthered with icons

  - » Relevant plans the project addressed

  - » Project description

  - » Before, during and after photos of project

  - » Quote from developer, community member and or city council member

  - » Costs to MRA

  - » The But-For test (sidebar)

  - » Return on investment (sidebar)

- » Opportunity costs (sidebar)

- » Infographics and icons

- 3.3 HOW IT WORKS

  - » Videos

  - » Infographics

- 3.4 FAQS

- 3.5 APPLICATION GUIDELINES

- 4.0 OTHER SERVICES

- 4.1 CODE COMPLIANCE PROGRAM (Description and Application Guidelines)

- 4.2 FAÇADE IMPROVEMENT (Description and Application Guidelines)

- 4.4 COMMERCIAL REHABILITATION LOAN PROGRAM (Description and Application Guidelines)

- 4.5 OUR PROJECTS

- 4.5.1 INDIVIDUAL PROJECT PAGE

  - » Follow Case study template

  - » Link to Engage Missoula

  - » Tag each study so it is searchable

  - » Link to relevant plans

  - » Relevant data and infographics

  - » Space for videos

- 5.0 WHO WE ARE

  - » Short statement about why the MRA exists

  - » Links to the other subpages

- 5.0.1. AGENDAS, MEETINGS & RECORDS (Index/Archives)

  - » Index page with brief description of subpages

- **5.0.1.1 AGENDAS & MEETINGS**

  - » Searchable by categories

    - • Date

    - • Type of project

    - • URD

    - • Tool used

    - • Size of project

  - » Searchable by keywords e.g., "housing," "deconstruction," "homelessness," "developer," "hotel," "sidewalk," "infrastructure," "private development," "sewer line," etc.

  - » Add links to MCAT

  - » Clear Zoom links

  - » Calendar

- **5.0.1.2 RECORDS**

  - » Master Projects List

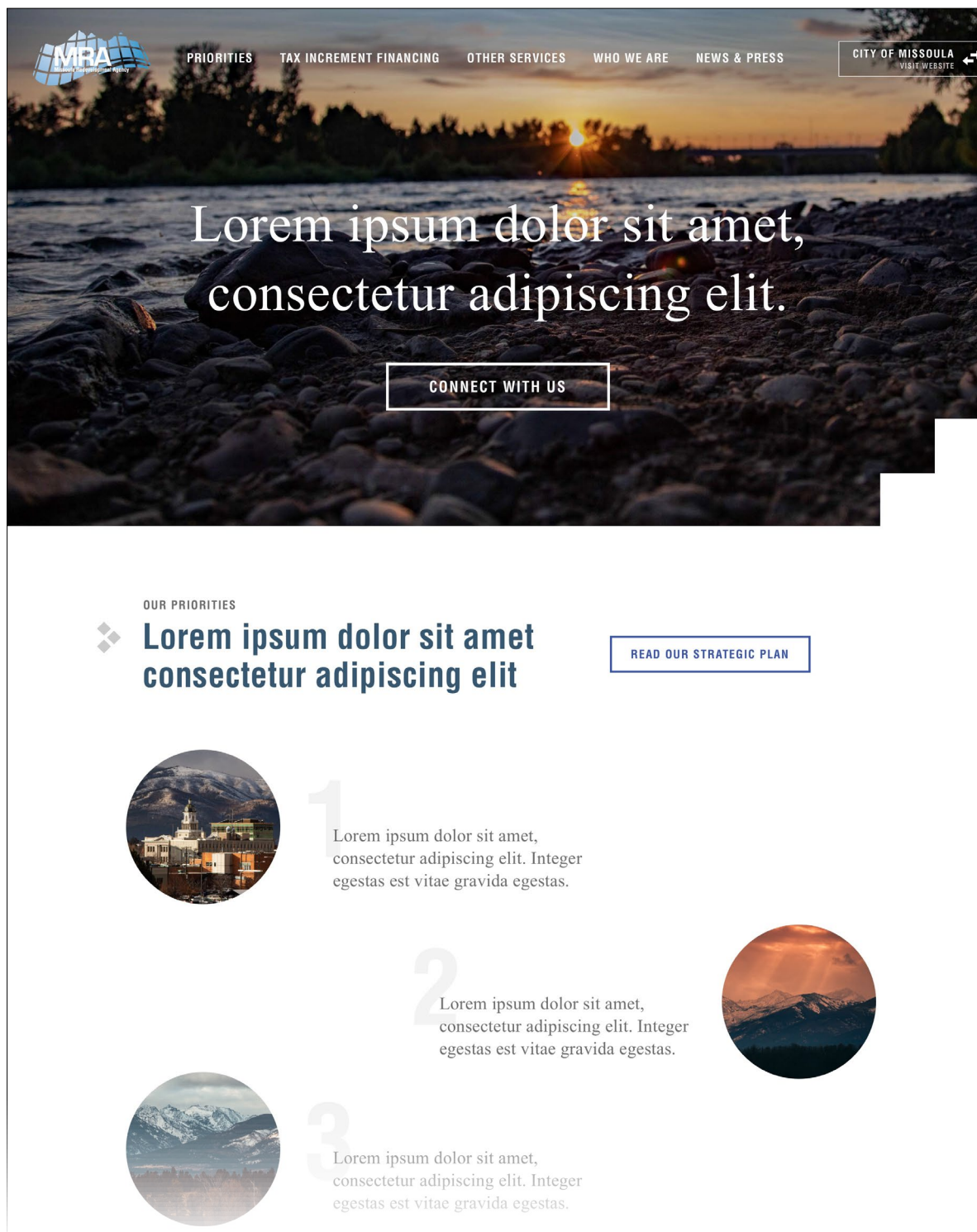   - • Needs to be tagged and searchable

  - » Contracts

- **5.0.1.3 RESOURCES**

  - » MRA bylaws

  - » Montana Code Annotated

  - » State of Montana Urban Renewal Law

  - » State of Montana Administrative Rules governing Tax Increment Financing

  - » Districts 42.19.14

  - » Urban Renewal Plans

  - » MRA State Prevailing Wage Rates Policy

- » Budget

- » All other relevant data

- 5.0.2 BOARD

- 5.0.2.1 INDIVIDUAL BOARD MEMBER PAGE

    - » Bio and contact (this could be an overlay)

- 5.0.3 STAFF

- 5.0.3.1 INDIVIDUAL STAFF/DIRECTOR PAGE

    - » Bio and contact (this could be an overlay)

- 5.0.4 HISTORY OF THE MRA

- 6.0 NEWS/PRESS

    - » Real time updates on projects

- 6.1 LATEST NEWS INDEX

- 6.2 FOR THE PRESS

    - » Press releases

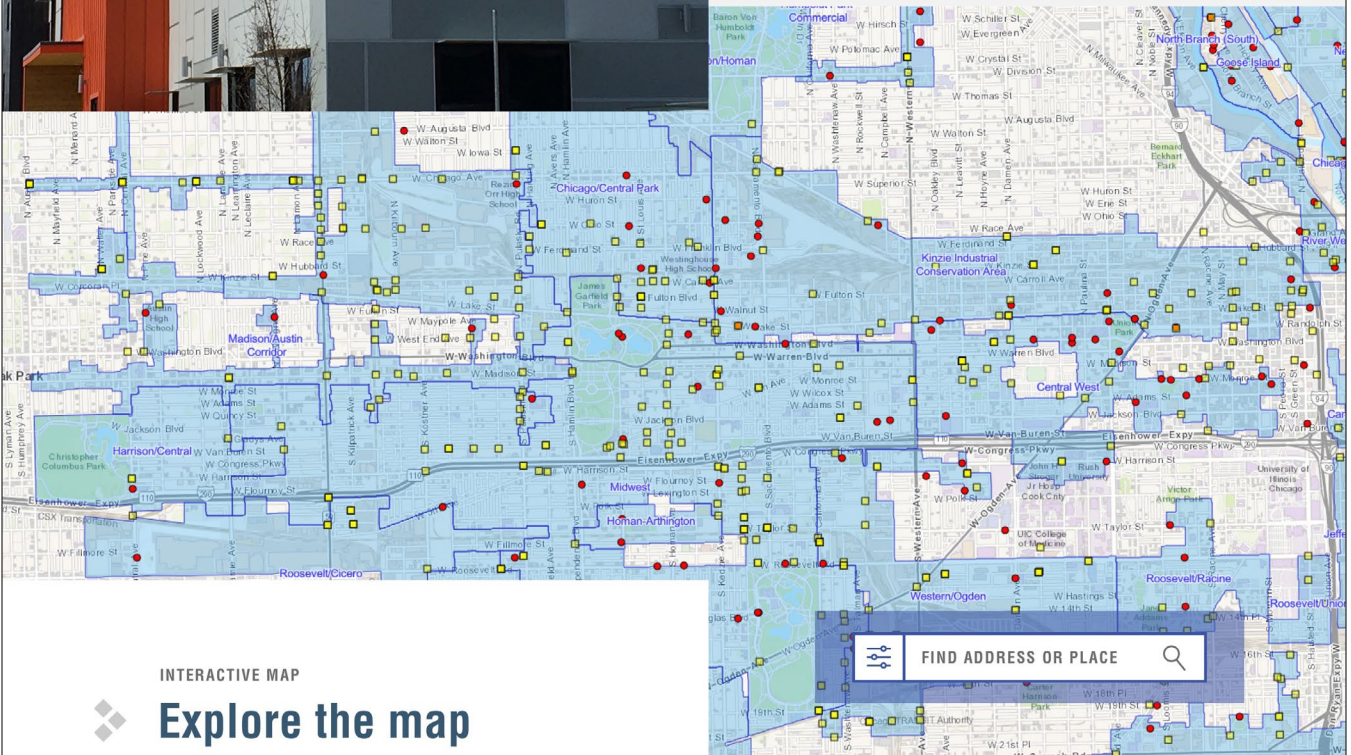   - » Photos of projects

WEBSITE HOMEPAGE EXAMPLES

Custom-Designed Website

❖ YWCA Missoula

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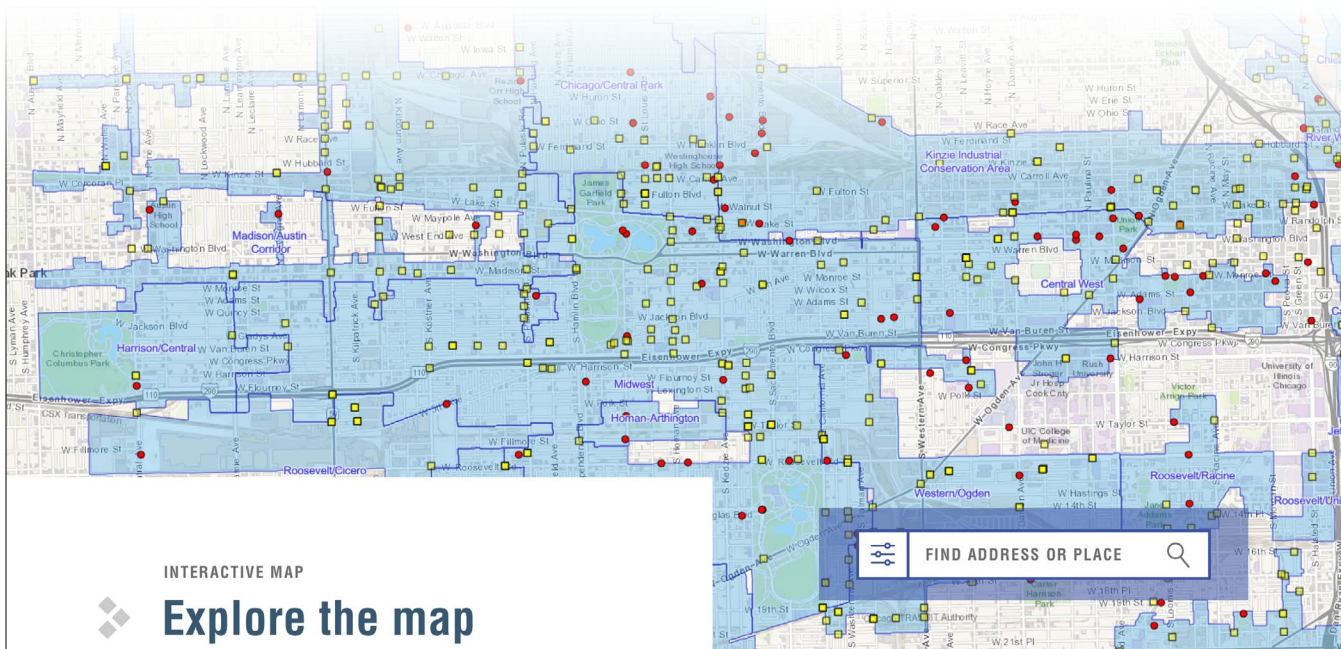
READ MORE

INTERACTIVE MAP

❖ Explore the map

Use the map above to explore past, future and current projects in Missoula.

SEE ALL PROJECTS

INTERACTIVE MAP

Explore the map

Use the map above to explore past, future and current projects in Missoula.

SEE ALL PROJECTS

MRA
Missoula Redevelopment Agency

PRIORITIES   TAX INCREMENT FINANCING   OTHER SERVICES   WHO WE ARE   NEWS & PRESS

CITY OF MISSOULA
VISIT WEBSITE

140 West Pine Street
Missoula, MT 59802

Phone: 406.552.6160
Fax: 406.552.6162
TTY Phone: 406.552.4777

WHO ARE WE?

MRA partners with public and private entities to help improve economic vitality, create jobs and encourage investment in Missoula neighborhoods. We also invest in public improvements like parks, trails, streets and sidewalks.

LAND ACKNOWLEGEMENT

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COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY

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CITY OF
MISSOULA

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Missoula Redevelopment Agency

GET CONNECTED

NEWSLETTER SIGNUP   SUBMIT

Example MRA on City website

SUBMIT

4

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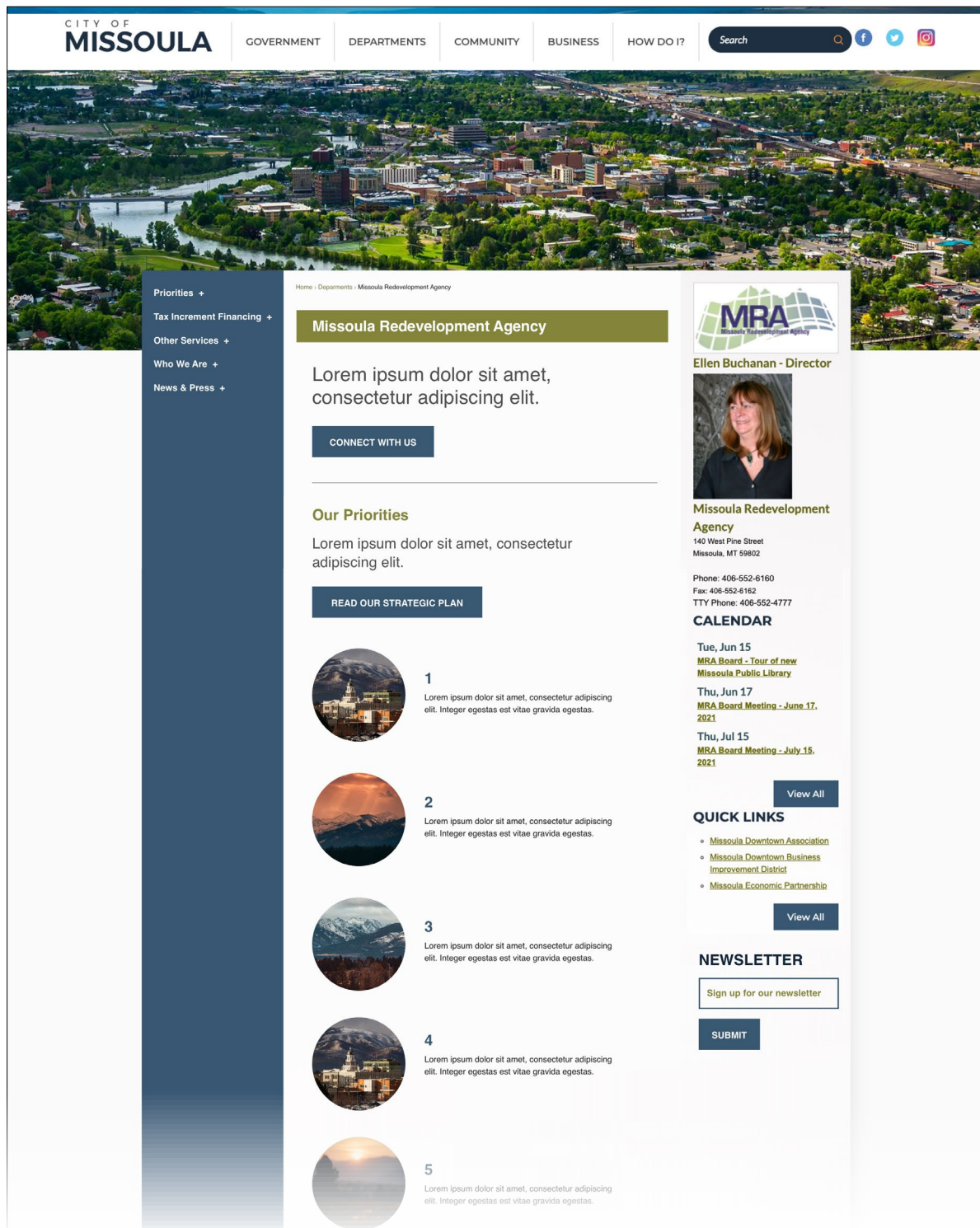Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Integer egestas est vitae gravida egestas.

Join Our Next Meeting

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VIEW NEXT MEETING AGENDA   VIEW LAST MEETING MINUTES
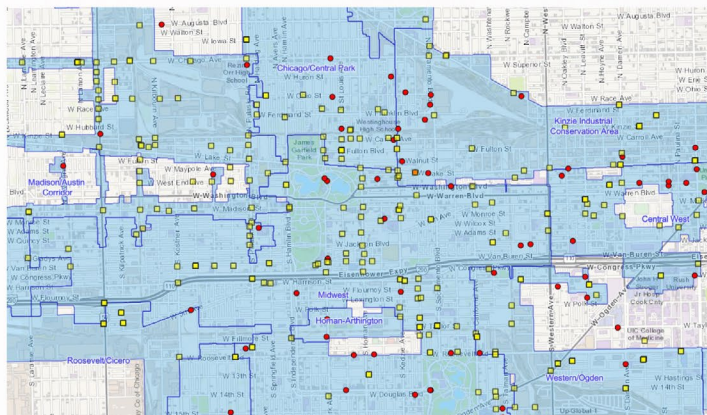
Featured Project — YWCA Missoula

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READ MORE

Explore The Map
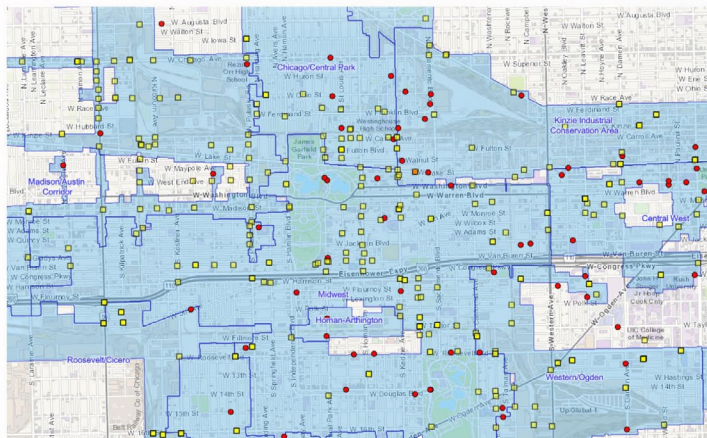
Use the map above to explore past, future and current projects in Missoula.

SEE ALL PROJECTS

current projects in Missoula.

SEE ALL PROJECTS

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PAYMENTS   MEETINGS   JOBS   PARKS & RECREATION   LICENSES & PERMITS   PUBLIC SAFETY

CONTACT US

435 Ryman St. Missoula, MT 59802
Phone: 406-552-6000 | TTY: 406-552-6131

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                                                 Information
Mayor's Initiatives   Zoning Information
                                                 Meet the City Council

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FAQS

How do I contact a city/county department?

Where can I find the answers to my frequently asked questions?

GOVERNMENT WEBSITES BY CIVICPLUS®

SOCIAL MEDIA CALENDAR EXAMPLE

Sample One-Month Posting Calendar   (Theme: Introduce the MRA and their work)

	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
WEEK 1		FB & Insta		FB & Insta		Focus: Who is the MRA and what benefit does it bring to Missoula?
			Twitter		Twitter	Focus: Connect with reporters by pointing them to Facebook and Instagram content.
WEEK 2		FB & Insta		FB & Insta		Focus: Highlight a few significant projects to date...recent ex: might include the MRL Park or Mary St.
			Twitter		Twitter	Focus: Connect with reporters by pointing them to Facebook and Instagram content
WEEK 3		FB & Insta		FB & Insta		Focus: What are the MRA priorities? + highlight possible points of engagement
			Twitter		Twitter	Focus: Connect with reporters by pointing them to Facebook and Instagram content
WEEK 4		FB & Insta		FB & Insta		Focus: Introduce upcoming projects to get ahead of the story
			Twitter		Twitter	Focus: Connect with reporters by pointing them to Facebook and Instagram content

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT MATRIX

TYPE OF ENGAGEMENT	GOAL OF PARTICIPATION	TOOLS/ ACTIVITIES	INCLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES	INDICATORS/ EVALUATION
INFORM *(required for all types of engagement)*	Educate the public about the rationale for the project or decision; how it fits with City goals and policies; issues being considered, areas of choice or where public input is needed. *Message to the Public:* To keep everyone informed.	■ Fact Sheets ■ Brochures ■ Websites ■ Open Houses ■ Exhibits/displays *(in public areas)* ■ Newsletters *(mailed/online)* ■ Newspaper articles	■ Translation of all key documents ■ Interpretation at events	
CONSULT	Gather information and ask for advice from citizens to better inform the City's work on the project. *Message to the Public:* Will keep everyone informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	■ Focus groups ■ Surveys, interviews, and questionnaires ■ Public Meetings ■ Door-to-door ■ Workshops and working sessions ■ Deliberative polling ■ Internet *(interactive techniques)*	■ Translation of all key documents ■ Interpretation at events ■ Provision of Childcare ■ Culturally appropriate food ■ Individual meetings with community leaders	
COLLABORATE	Create a partnership with the public (key stakeholder groups) to work along with the City in identifying problems, generating solutions, getting reactions to recommendations and proposed direction. *Message to the Public:* Will work with the public to ensure that their concerns and issues are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and show how public input influenced the decision.	■ Citizen Advisory Committee/Liaison Groups ■ Visioning ■ Consensus building ■ Participatory decision-making ■ Charrettes ■ Implementation Committee	■ Translation of all key documents ■ Interpretation at events ■ Provision of Childcare ■ Culturally appropriate food ■ Individual meetings with community leaders	
SHARED DECISION-MAKING	Decision-makers delegate decision-making power to stakeholders or give them a formal role in making final recommendations to be acted upon. *Message to the Public:* Will implement what the public decides.	■ Citizen juries ■ Ballots ■ Delegated decisions to specific representative citizen body or to voters	■ Translation of all key documents ■ Interpretation at events ■ Provision of Childcare ■ Culturally appropriate food ■ Individual meetings with community leaders	

"Public Engagement Matrix" by The Seattle Race and Justice Initiative

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN MISSOULA

Excerpts from Interviews with Missoula Community Organizers

When there's the lack of an engaged citizen culture, there are a lot of barriers that you can't do anything about because you can't do anything about the lower income person that just says they don't care about me anyway. I'm not going to go to that meeting. Or I don't want to talk to your dumb ass coming to my door. I don't even know you, you haven't spent any time with me. Right? They (the MRA) can't do anything about that. So, I do think at the neighborhood level, in terms of neighborhood engagement, if they want to do something about that, maybe they could at the neighborhood office actually build the capacity to spend relational time and build trust, which means door knocking, inviting people to meetings, one-on-ones—they can do that.

It starts with, and it's not anyone's fault, at like someone's being an intentional bad actor. It starts with a kind of base of how we've come to be in a really unhealthy democracy at a local level where citizens generally are disillusioned and citizens aren't that participatory. And then in that vacuum, local government, partially out of, "I really don't want to deal with a bunch of people's opinions anyway," and "I have my own good intentions and good ideas," we develop a bad culture of just going with stuff and telling people later.

The way we think about things in our organizing, we think about the public arena. And who's involved in shaping the big decisions that we deal with, like how we spend money. And where it goes. We have the market sector, there's government, and then we have the civil sector and for all kinds of reasons, our civil sector is just really kind of shriveled up and incredibly reactive.

The only time people show up to things or are engaged is when it's directly involving their life and it's pissing them off basically.

The government sector's experience of engaging the civil sector is not very good because all they get is just hammered. But the market sector has deep interest in what the hell happens in some of these things. And they're very involved. And in Missoula, the City Council, they're very involved in a more behind-the-scenes type of way.

By the time things get into the kind of more open public arena with City Council and everything, mostly City Council is rubber stamping a lot. And so, the market's very influential in terms of how these things go.

The City government and government programs are trying to do community engagement out of the government sector. And that's really hard to do. It's hard to do in a democratic culture or in a community where the civil sector is where it's at right now. It's really the job of the civil sector to be strong and to be engaged and to be robust.

Part of local government's job, and this might be a little bit outside the box, is to actually build the civil sector and to build healthy democracy, and to support and fund healthy democracy and healthy, strong citizen engagement because that's what creates the soil for when you have that open house. And you actually get people there.

It's a puzzle how to do community engagement. But to do it, you have to have trust and people have had a lot of bad experiences and their perception is, "I don't get listened to so why should I even do it."

And so you are in a city government, and you're in the MRA and you're trying to do authentic engagement, but in our political climate, there is so much tension. Everyone is reactive and defensive. The deep work is to be respectful and build relationships. The basis of community engagement comes from respecting people and building relationships.

It's been in a context of the murder of George Floyd and everything, so tension and everyone's just reactive and defensive. It's definitely been in that context, but we've definitely had, in our really deep work, to try to be very respectful and, and do this stuff through relationships, it's been really hard. The basis of this community engagement, does come from that authentic, "are you serious about respecting people in your community" engagement.

That kind of honest, respectful, authentic engagement has a lot underneath it. It's about methods it's about underlying structure. In terms of more actionable things from the City, like actually trying to do community engagement, setting parameters around what engagement is…defining at a neighborhood, defining exactly on a project basis and on a geography basis, defining what engagement actually looks like in terms of depth and diversity.

What you really have to do is you have to spend time building relationships and you have to organize, it takes a lot of time. That's what organizing is, but you can't, city government shouldn't be expected to organize—though, in terms of what a city government can do, and I've seen it like out in Sydney, Australia where the government is funding organizing at a neighborhood level. They're funding the building of an actual engaged, democratic culture, because you have to have that as the soil. If you want to do real community engagement.

It's a bigger City thing. And the MRA, above all of that relational work, in terms of actual engagement, needs to set parameters on depth and diversity and then methods following that, and your methods have to be, as personal as possible, if you're going to reach more people who just don't participate in these things. So, the door knocking.

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FULL STAFF SUMMARY

The MRA staff is a strong but mighty group.

> *We are a six-person office, but we have the impact of, I think, a 20-person office.*

Staff members go to great lengths to help people and have a reputation as being thorough and hard working.

An MRA project might come from a developer who understands TIF.

> *There are savvy developers who are, for instance, making improvements to their building, know that there's an opportunity to come to MRA and ask for assistance.*

Or start out with a phone call from an interested business owner.

> *We get a lot of phone calls where the first question is, "Hey, I've got a piece of property and my banker told me to give you guys a call.*
>
> *What I try to do is to sit down and try to flesh out what their dream is… a businessperson might say, "I want to put a small grocery store in downtown. I want to build a hotel. How do I get to that point?" So, we try to narrow down what they want to do for their project and what we need to make that work.*

When a project does seem to be a good fit, MRA staff works with the business owner or the developer, to get the project to a point where it can be taken to the MRA Board for consideration and approval or to the City Council if a bond is involved.

We try to keep everything at a staff level for as long as we can. We flesh out projects. We know our Board. We know the process. We know the City Council if it has to go that far. So, we want to make sure that any project is as good as it possibly gets. We have an application process which is pretty step-by-step.

Then the staff puts together a very comprehensive presentation that, in most cases, leads to MRA Board approval.

Honestly, the staff doesn't take a recommendation to the Board unless it's favorable.

The perception that the MRA just gives money away is tough for a staff that works diligently to vet every project. Most of the projects that come to the MRA do not make it to the Board level because they do not meet the legal standards for TIF support or do not meet the proper standards and criteria for the MRA Board.

The Board, say staff members, brings a second layer of due diligence to every project, along with a wealth of knowledge and experience.

The MRA Board administers a lot of money and is not elected but they are intelligent and thoughtful and drill down into projects. They are incredibly conscientious about their charge to guard public money.

However, all the work that goes into preparing projects to take to the MRA Board has left staff little time to communicate with the public about the work they're doing and the positive impacts the MRA and TIF have in the community. Staff members agree that there needs to be better communication about the MRA and TIF. They just don't know how to do it or even how to find the capacity to do work outside of the projects they're working on.

We've got some really big projects that we're working on right now. And you know, we as a City, need to understand how we talk about those things at something other than a Zoom City Council or MRA Board meeting. How do you create that capacity without having to rob time, from what I consider to be our real work, which is getting the projects done?

Staff members have done a great job of making sure that everything is documented in great detail. Each project has an audit with a narrative, called a management discussion and they have recently completed the hard work of digitizing old records so that everything is available on the website. This makes the public criticism of the MRA not being transparent, particularly difficult to hear.

Still, the MRA has not made telling their story a priority, mostly because of capacity but also because they all find it difficult to "toot their own horn." They also find it difficult to explain the complications and nuances involved with TIF. These involve a lot of partners and coalitions and have a lot of "moving parts." It can also be hard to talk about current projects due to issues of confidentiality.

Staff members say there is a need to figure out how to share more information with the public earlier in the process of developing a project.

In terms of public perception, staff members think that most people in the community don't even think about TIF unless it affects them personally. They also say that most people who understand what the MRA does are big cheerleaders.

I think a lot of people perceive us positively and that we do good things and help to make Missoula a better place.

But there is some negativity about the MRA and TIF. Staff members believe that it is getting worse and "the negative feedback has been all over the map."

Some people believe that MRA is here to make rich people richer…on the other end of the spectrum, it's that we do too much community work and we don't help businesses directly.

Staff sees a lot of "bad information about MRA is getting passed around. Things that are actually very objective are seen as being subjective."

Many people see TIF as "an extra tax on things." It doesn't help, say staff members, that when the county sends out tax bills, "the way they record TIF is as if it's a tax…it's listed on your tax bill and it'll say Urban Renewal District Three, and then it'll show how much dollar amount of your tax bill goes to that. And so, we'll get phone calls, like, 'What is this on my tax bill? And when is it going away?' And the reality of it is that it's not a tax, it's a portion of the tax that they would already pay, but the way the county does it is confusing."

Negative press and comments on social media and public comment at City Council meetings rose significantly in 2019 before the pandemic. MRA staff members recognize that part of this has been due to "a broader cultural and political divide in our country" and that some local and state politicians have been using TIF as a "wedge issue." They also believe that some of the criticism cannot be addressed and should just be ignored.

> *I figure there's going to be noise out there. No matter what we do with this project, no matter, you know, what wonderful things we spend TIF dollars on, no matter if we save the world, there's some things that are not going to change.*

Still, all of the attention has left staff members feeling overly scrutinized and they worry that it will have negative effects on the work. They also have concerns that the negative attention could even lead to changes from the state legislature.

The MRA staff would like to be more proactive in outreach to prevent this misinformation from spreading and to strengthen the work through greater community engagement. They want people to know what the MRA is actually doing and its greater purpose.

> *MRA wants to make great places where people live, work and do business.*

According to staff members, most people respond really well to examples of what TIF has done. Staff would like "clear case studies for each project that can go on the web and also some that can

be printed and handed out." They would also like "before and after photos for projects from a professional photographer."

Staff members note a "need to educate the public about public benefit and public projects. They (the public) only focus on private development. The MRA doesn't get recognized for social projects like health centers, Homeword projects, Carousel, trails, etc."

The MRA website needs improvement, according to staff members. Project information is "buried," there could be more information about what makes a project eligible for financing and, again, there are not enough case studies or photos of past projects. Staff members would like the website to be a place for people go to "fact check" misinformation "floating around the community."

Staff members want a social media presence, but some members are hesitant because it "opens up the floodgates to dialogue and negative comments." A clear policy on communication that "everyone sticks to" would help, they say, as would a clear plan on how to make public announcements about new projects, do proactive outreach to the press, stay up-to-date on social media, advertise meetings and gather information for case studies.

> *MRA needs tools to communicate TIF that are sophisticated, easy to use, impactful and can reach a broader audience.*

Staff members also request educational videos about TIF, signage for projects, and a new way of naming projects that does not put the developer first.

Internal communications could also improve, staff members say. It is sometimes difficult to know what everyone is working on because things happen so fast, and the nature of projects means they're ever changing. Due to a large workload and a shortage of time, some discussions between the Mayor's office and the MRA executives are not shared with staff. Staff members would like a better process for getting more information. This became more of an issue during COVID-19 while everyone was working at home.

In addition, staff members would like policies and procedure for keeping permanent records "in real time." One suggestion is keeping a "fillable PDF or master sheet at the end of the project that staff has to send to one person who will enter it. We can't showcase a project if the information isn't collected."

" Everything MRA does is public and accessible but there is a lot more that could be done.

Several staff members said there needs to be somebody who manages communication but there is no capacity within the MRA to supervise them. One thought is to hire an additional communications person at the City who spends part of their time on the MRA. And yet, everyone agrees, there is so much that needs to be done.

MRA staff are proud of the work they are doing in Missoula. They point to the private projects that are "priming the pump" for public projects. They talk about their work supporting and implementing City plans that came from community desires including the widely popular sidewalk programs and the current push to build more housing for all. Staff members say people don't understand that the MRA is supporting City policy and "they don't understand the degree to which MRA is allocating resources to implement it."

Staff members also point to the fact that the MRA is much more "big picture" than it used to be. They want people to know that the organization really is working to make Missoula a better place to live. One goal is "to walk away from these districts when they sunset with all the necessary infrastructure in place that needs to be there."

FULL BOARD SUMMARY

The MRA Board is full of dedicated people with a wealth of knowledge about TIF and community development. They take their job of following the Montana rules for TIF very seriously and constantly point back to the law when talking about a project's feasibility. It's clear that each Board member serves because they are passionate about helping the community. They think the MRA does critical work for the community and see the projects that they approve as investments in Missoula's future.

> *Missoula is a shining star on how financing can be used to allow public private partnerships in the redevelopment and areas of blight.*

> *Investments by the MRA have a ripple effect. And all of that helps businesses. It helps improve areas that are in decline. It helps improve the tax base.*

> *TIF let's Missoula use incentives instead of zoning, so there are less government restrictions while still supporting our community values.*

Like the MRA staff, Board members are also concerned about community perceptions of the MRA and TIF. Board members have heard the criticisms, mostly in op-eds and on social media, and believe that most of the controversy comes from misunderstanding. TIF is a complicated tool, they say, and there needs to be more education about it.

> *People don't understand what it (TIF) is and why these programs exist.*

> *Even the champions of MRA on Council don't fully understand the process.*

People who understand TIF support it but there is a lot of ignorance or misinformation out there.

Board members have great success when they talk to people one-on-one about the MRA and TIF, and would like to have more opportunities to have these discussions.

> *I'm glad when somebody actually asks questions. There was something in the news one day about TIF...and a guy I knew was like "what about the MRA giving money to corporations?" And I'm like, "No, no, no, we don't give money to corporations other than to reimburse for public amenities that they have already paid for. And we will reimburse for public improvements."He was surprised, even though his employer had already gotten MRA funding twice. People just don't really know the details.*

Board members would like more opportunities to go speak to community members about the MRA and TIF. They are frustrated that more people don't come to Board meetings, especially those who are so vocal about their concerns. Board members genuinely want to hear from the community and are open to ways to improve the process. They also realize that they can't reach everyone personally. Therefore, they'd like the MRA to do more outreach and communication. Most members feel that the MRA needs to be doing this baseline education all the time so that when a story comes up in the paper or on social media, the public isn't so quick to jump to conclusions.

> *In the moment when there's controversy, you can't orient people very well. We want to give them the tools, so, when those big projects, those controversial things, happen, they have a better base of knowledge from which to decide whether they want to be an objector.*

We need to be out front and working to educate the public on the program.

It's not productive to go head-to-head on details with opponents but to be more proactive in educating so that the community has a base level of knowledge to decide whether or not they support the investment of public funds on a particular project.

MRA Board members are hugely complimentary of staff.

> *The staff is excellent. They do such diligence in reviewing these projects before they even reach our consideration.*

> *What the public doesn't understand is how much work goes into the planning of these proposals before they come to, the Board for consideration.*

Board members echo the staff's assessment that everyone has been so busy with their heads down making projects happen, that communication has suffered. They say that the MRA has done a good job of documenting projects, pointing to the detailed audits which give evidence-based arguments for each project and the staff memos. There have been, they say, logical steps for all staff and Board decisions and they have been "well-documented but not summarized."

Also, like the staff, they admit that they thought that if they "just did a good job, people would see the benefits."

> *What we've done well is that we've done our job and we've done it transparently. And, in terms of communicating that, I don't think we've done a very good job of doing that.*

Board members also say that many times "engineers and technical experts instead of communications experts are communicating with public on TIF projects." And that communication efforts need to reach the entire community, not just residents of URDs.

Board members point to the website as a big part of the problem. It doesn't clearly state what the MRA does or show case studies. Information is hard to find, and it's not clear how to attend meetings.

> *Even if I wanted to come to a meeting, it's really hard to figure out how on the website right now. So, when people say you're not transparent and you're hiding things, I think it's just a matter of user experience. Really. There's some low-hanging fruit there.*

Why aren't their status updates on projects?

It needs to be updated. It's hard to find information and it doesn't go through the process of how projects are approved.

There is no basic education and they have not worked to publicize the successes. I'd like to see a list of completed projects…a collection of successes that if someone wanted to click on and review…we could really kind of dig in and show all the projects that have happened and pick one District that's been really successful and maybe target that and just say, look at all the good…at a minimum, some photos of completed projects would be a powerful way to publicize the good that happens.

All the Board members say they see the benefit to better show off the projects that have been done but also to let the public know how projects fit City goals. The MRA, they say, looks to various City plans to see what goals have been set for Districts. There is strategic planning in districts at the beginning, middle and end. The Board also looks to City Council to make sure they are following major policy goals.

"I don't think we look at ourselves as developing new goals for an area, but rather looking at and adapting and enhancing or promoting things that are already done in the area.

The vision is to get redevelopment and to build pipes and tubes and sidewalks and curbs and gutters, and, and to make these projects more affordable so that we can have projects in these places.

Board members say they think that it would help to post their goals on the website for more clarity and transparency but are cautious about leaving some room for the unexpected.

"Sometimes things come up that aren't within those goals but are good for the community, so it needs to be flexible.

Goals would be good, but the innovation happens in the margins, like the Food Bank.

Board members also point to very clear list of criteria that Board and staff use to approve a project.

"MRA structure is sound and not people-based. It operates based on previous studies that have been done on areas and policies that the City Council has decided on.

However, Board members do agree that the public might not be aware of those criteria.

And when we get the packets, we read the memos and it really means the memos are so important. There are many times that we don't have very many questions left unanswered by their (staff) analysis, and unless you are interested enough to read through them, I think even folks who attend the meeting, which are not very many people, if at all, they would get the impression that they are kind of surface level. They may get the impression there's only a surface-level consideration of these projects. And this is not accurate. I mean, consistently these projects are really well thought out and they're well supported. I don't know how many projects don't make it to us, but I think that there are a significant number.

Besides showing the checklist of criteria more clearly, Board members suggest altering the memo to have more information about the benefits of the project.

I don't know that we talk about the benefits as much as we could. And even though the point of the criteria on the memos does talk about how much taxes would be generated from the project. It's not just taxes that are the benefits so we don't think that the benefits are communicated as well as they could be. You know, like, even in terms of your return on investment.

The memos contain a lot of information and they certainly could contain references to Downtown plans. In the Downtown area, there's a whole litany of planning that has gone on before all of the projects that come before MRA. There are similar foundations for other projects too…a catalog of, or an appendix of those projects that were reviewed by staff could be compiled for every project that we've done and certainly that could be incorporated into the memo.

Board members also suggest trying to show more underlying data without breaking confidentiality.

Sometimes, for bigger projects, there is a desire by at least some community members or City Council members to see more of the underlying data. And if there were a process to obtain that and put it on the website, that would be helpful.

Board members also think the MRA could do a better job of showing where requests come from.

Maybe we don't emphasize enough when some big project comes up, the foundation of the project. I mean the bridge over Reserve Street came to us through the trails that the trail system going up the Bitterroot…it fit those background things. It wasn't something that MRA created out of whole cloth.

In terms of engagement, Board members feel limited by statute. At the creation of each District, there is a very public and open engagement process. Once the URD is established, there is no current process for additional engagement. Board members say they feel like engagement is reflected in the plans that they work to support and from Council members who represent the community. However, they do think it would be helpful to provide more information, education, and project updates to community members both within URDs and without.

Board members also say that they are working to realize the goals of the community. Rather than giving developers money, they see themselves as working to help developers create projects that are of greater benefit to the community. They also recognize that Missoula is growing and that residents don't like and, in some cases, are afraid of growth. People see economic development as synonymous with growth and therefore see TIF as causing growth. In reality, TIF as an important tool to preserve the wishes of community members going forward. With TIF, the MRA is able to help focus the growth in Missoula with the projects that it funds.

I don't think that growth takes care of itself. It needs planning.

As one member put it, the City needs to "participate in projects so that we can control and have a voice in how these spaces are redeveloped." Other Board members echo the notion that "if you have a stake in it, you have a say in it." They point to many projects and showed how the MRA made drastic public improvements. Again, they say, case studies and improved memos would go a long way toward dispelling myths and misinformation about how the MRA uses TIF.

Board members have also heard the criticism that the City uses MRA to avoid raising taxes. They suggest that TIF revenues should not be used to bail out the budget and point to the importance of staying engaged with the Mayor and City Council on planning around the budget. Others say that when people have animosity toward any part of City government, they take it out on the MRA and TIF projects. They say that the press sometimes fans the flames because they are looking for a good story.

Still, they acknowledge that MRA projects have gotten bigger and more complicated. They reiterate the need for education and more information to make sure that everyone in the community has an opportunity to learn about TIF and become engaged in the process.

Board members have some specific thoughts in terms of messaging.

If we did not invest the funds, the sidewalks would not look the same. The corners would not be handicap accessible. The boulevards would not be landscaped in the same manner. There wouldn't…all of these efforts are tailored specifically to meet public concerns and interests and those things would not happen but for our participation.

Talk about what happens if you don't combat blight, I mean, these neighborhoods continue to decline, property values go down, businesses suffer, people flee, vacancy rates increase.

Show the true public benefit that comes from the money that is disbursed.

People need to know that payments are not handed out. They are reimbursed. Contractors only get reimbursed if they prove that they have done the work MRA required/funded for public good.

Taxes do not go to TIF if you are not in a URD and if you are in a URD, only a portion go to TIF. And in that case, here are all the benefits you get.

Talk about how TIF does raise taxes slightly, but that is outweighed by the benefits of what it creates like jobs.

People should understand how TIF projects have a far greater impact than just in the District where they are created.

Like staff, Board members agree that there needs to be a dedicated communications person. They also don't know if that person should be assigned to the MRA or to the City in general. Either way, Board members want to be more helpful. They believe that they could and should be doing more "aggressive" outreach. They would like to do speaking tours, hold house parties, write op-eds and letters to the editor, and help field questions from the press. They are also hoping for some tools, like PowerPoint presentations and handouts, to help them do that.

> *I would like a PowerPoint for public presentations, to help educate people on what TIF financing is and from a very high level, and then give some examples of how it is utilized and how it's improved our community.*

They would also like tools that they can share with allies to educate their teams/constituents and encourage them to be thinking about how they can help inform the public:

> *Everyone that supports MRA needs to have a mindset switch so that knowledge is never assumed and that there is always the opportunity to educate.*

Board members also spoke about doing more outreach with neighborhood councils and having Board members be more involved in community planning meetings so that they know firsthand what the community thinks.

> *Going to the meetings with community gives you the full picture, not just the engineer's report.*

They are also looking for ways to check in with residents of URDs throughout the lifespan of the District—especially checking in with the people who were active in the planning process. Community members, they say, have great ideas and the Board is looking for ways to keep people engaged.

There is low hanging fruit, say Board members. Names of projects could be changed so that they don't reference developers but instead the actual work that the MRA is doing on each project. And signage could be helpful in showing people just how much good the MRA is providing in the community.

Most importantly, say Board members, "we need to lead with our why with each project. Why are we doing this? It needs to be crystal clear to the community."

FULL CITY COUNCIL SUMMARY

Many City Council members note that MRA and TIF issues are among the most challenging issues faced by our community, complicated by the level of detail as well as the amount of misinformation.

> *A lot of people just have a total misunderstanding about how it works, what the money gets spent on, who benefits and all of those things. I think there's a real lack of understanding that TIF money paid for the land for the Sweet Grass Commons, the affordable housing complex, for example, and that if it hadn't been for that, that affordable housing would not be…. Everyone just thinks , "Oh, you guys gave money for what's his name who built the Merc hotel and you gave money to Stockman Bank." To me, the biggest misconception is that we're giving money to any of those developers. There's just a lack of understanding that what we're doing is paying for something to happen within that development so that it happens the way that we want it to happen.*

One interviewee says that a lot of the issue is our current culture of "grievance politics" where people get caught up in their victimization.

> *There's these grievance politics…instead of focusing on all that we do well, the progress we have made and have yet to do, instead, it's so much easier as humans to just be like, "yeah, I've been slighted too and converge around that."*

Another member points to the fact that many people are not willing to even understand the processes of government.

> *Some people aren't willing to even understand the basics of process and how things work and where a City Council's decision-making abilities are. There is a lack of being willing to do accurate power analysis.*

One Council member says that there are "opponents on both the far right and far left and neither side is open to hearing much." Another says, we should focus on the "radical middle" who, they fear, are starting to distrust the MRA, Council, and the process.

> *I don't think it's unique to the MRA stuff. There's a percentage for whom it doesn't matter what we do there. They're not going to like it. The group of people we need to reach is the radical middle. When I start getting questions from folks that I know are perfectly rational, reasonable people, where there's a large values overlap…not that you have to agree on everything…but I hear it in their voice. And it's not necessarily the details of what they're saying. It is the suspicion that is behind the comments they're making, where there's an erosion of trust.*

Some Council members talk of NIMBYism (Not In My Backyard) as being an issue with MRA projects and also a lack of imagination about why a project is good for the community if it doesn't directly benefit them.

> *It's a weird disconnect between that macro level and then like the micro level execution. There's a little bit of the not in my backyard mentality, where it's like, "Yeah, we want affordable housing, but you know, not if it's on my street." There's always going to be a little bit of a rub because people will agree on things that are good for the community overall, but then it's less easy to agree to things if they're next door to you.*

> *Like the bridge to nowhere…people that don't use it just can't imagine that anybody else would be using it. It's a lack of imagination, really. It's like, "Oh, well, you don't get out of your car so you just assume the rest of the world is like you. And just because you didn't see someone go across it when you were driving under it, it means that nobody ever goes across it."*

Some critics even use MRA funding and then turn around and criticize MRA.

> *One of the people who's been vocal against it is the guy who owns [a local business] and he freaking has benefited from it, the whole remodel on the front of his building. He got like $40,000 into funding to do that. So that's the other part is that people who got their benefit on one side and then they're kicking us in the behind on the other side.*

It's all very frustrating to most Council members but, they say, if you take the time and talk to people about it directly, most people get it and see the value.

> *If they're willing to have a longer conversation and they're somewhat open-minded, then you can point to the examples of where TIF has really fulfilled its ideal promise, like the Downtown and explain like that was because of TIF. Then they get it.*

> *There are people who have their minds made up and won't change but most people, when presented with a fair and honest non-preachy explanation, understand it and feel it is valuable.*

Most City Council members also say the MRA staff and Board are doing great work. They commend staff for how prepared they are for each Board meeting and the Board for its diligence in scrutinizing every project. They also believe that TIF is a crucial tool for Missoula, especially as we enter another period of growth.

> *TIF is an incredibly powerful tool. I think the MRA and everyone involved at the City is rightfully proud of the work that's happened within the Districts over time. Because of the challenges we are facing, we are taking responsible steps to prioritize housing and housing-related activities, within the Districts. The bar is higher now and it should be higher.*

However, many members question the autonomy of the MRA Board, citing that only two boards (the MRA and The Parking Commission) get to approve projects without Council. They think this is especially problematic since Board members are appointed only by the Mayor.

Some interviewees think that this contributes to the perception that a few people are making decisions for the City without community oversight.

> *They [detractors] kind of have a point that the makeup of the MRA Board has always been kind of a closed loop.*

A big criticism I hear is, "Oh, the Mayor gets to appoint who's on that MRA Board. It's filled with his cronies." It seems unbalanced in the decision-making process to them.

Many members say that the City should consider diversifying "where our board members come from."

I often feel, and this is a general statement across boards, that it's a good idea to diversify where our Board members are appointed from. I think we've been pretty lucky in my opinion…to have a Mayor and the Council that have a strong alignment in values. I don't think as a community, we can take that for granted. That might not always be the case. And I know it hasn't always been the case.

They also point out that the Board should be more diverse in many ways. It should represent differing genders, races, sexualities, political points of view, and even be more geographically representative.

I do share some concerns about the makeup of the Board. On the one hand, they've been a dedicated group of people who have volunteered their time, but they're all white, upper middle-class people. It would be kind of nice to see some diversity on the Board. It's always great, especially with a Board like that, but, on the other hand, you really do have to know what you're doing. This is not a thing that you just show up and vote, and it doesn't matter. It takes some technical knowledge. And so those people have been great that they've continued to serve, but if no one ever steps aside, you never give other people the opportunity to lead in that capacity.

A few members suggest that the MRA add the Chair of the Finance and Administration Committee as an ex officio Board member.

The Finance and Administration chair should be part of the conversations and then discussion. Sure, MRA can say, "well, our meetings are always open. Anyone can come." I think it's different than being part of the Board. And I think that a City Council member should be part of the Board because that then allows the City Council member to report back to the rest of Council so we're not sometimes blindsided by a big project that we need to look at, or we can then be aware of other projects that don't come to City Council that are happening in perhaps our wards.

Or, says one member, there should be a representative from City Council, the County and MCPS on the Board.

Since, TIF is pulling from the tax base, not only of the City, but also of the County and MCPS, basically all other taxing entities, having an ex-officio board member from those entities would be good. They wouldn't necessarily vote on stuff, but they would be a connector who communicates back and forth to keep each other on the same page.

But most Council members agree that the Board has very specific technical knowledge and that it would not be a good idea for the MRA Board to be elected.

Part of the consternation about the make-up of the Board centers around the fact that most projects are approved at the MRA Board level and never come before Council. Council mostly only sees the larger projects that require bonds.

It's only a very small fraction of projects that then come to Council for approval. It's got to be a bonding issue. I'd be curious to calculate the percentage of the number of projects that come through that actually come before Council.

And the projects that do come to City Council are high-profile.

If it's bonded, those tend to be the bigger projects, and the more high-profile projects are things like the Reserve Street bridge and the Merc. They're big and they're divisive. So that's when we get into the sticky wicket on all of this in terms of Council.

Other Council members say that City Council is a policy-making body and that a specific TIF project that meets regulatory requirements shouldn't necessarily be voted down just because City Council doesn't like it.

> *I think it would hamstring MRA if every decision that they wanted to make came from the City Council.*

They say the Board structure is just right. It's not Council's job to get too involved with projects, and that MRA staff does a good job managing project approval. Some projects do come before Council for funding approval, and that's fine, they say, but MRA staff and Board roles shouldn't overlap too much with City Council roles.

> *Some Council members want more oversight, but the structure is fine as is. It's right that MRA operates with a lot of autonomy.*
>
> *It's not Council's job to get too involved with projects. Staff does a good job.*

They also note that the MRA Board is made up of people with very specialized knowledge and that it's crucial that Council trusts them to make complicated decisions.

> *As in any leadership position, you can't know all things about all things. It's impossible. So, we rely on experts in those fields to advise us. And that is how I see MRA.*

Still, Council members do want more information and more involvement. They say that the way the process is now, it puts them in an awkward position of having to approve projects that come before them or risk unraveling deals that have already been signed.

There is no opportunity for us to provide feedback. When it finally gets to us, it only comes in a format of approving the bonding. And by that point in time, if a majority of council decided to vote against it, I don't know legally, what would happen because the money has already been spent.

I've been a little frustrated at times by the fact that the MRA will just come to us completely after the fact when really contracts are all signed and there's no backing out, and we're asked to vote on something… why do we go through this charade? I mean, we could say no but it would totally undo so much work and break contracts that have already been agreed to.

Almost all Council members are asking for a regular process for updates.

I'd like regular updates for each District, so, when I have a constituent reach out to me, I know immediately where we are.

I think MRA is down in the weeds but that doesn't mean the rest of us are. They have a very good finger on the pulse, but having, if nothing else, updates to Council on "this is what we've accomplished" would be good.

And they would also like some sort of informal process of checking in at the beginning of each budgeting period.

I imagine that the Board and Ellen usually have an idea at the beginning of the year, of some big projects that they're interested in accomplishing. Maybe they could give us a heads up, like a regular briefing of "these are some of the things that we're working on." I know that can be tough because of the nature of our public meetings and that when they say something to us, it cannot be private. But I wish that we could figure out a way for City Council to have a little more advanced notice of what, at least, people are thinking about.

I wish that whenever the MRA understands what their budget's going to be for the coming year that we would get some communication from them about what they think some of the priorities might be.

Speaking of priorities, most Council members say that clear goals and priorities would really help with both process and communication. Yes, they say, the MRA does follow City plans but there are a lot of plans, and they all overlap.

We have so many guiding documents like neighborhood surveys or master plans for different parts of town. And then we have the URD plans and there's just a lot. I'm on a project where one of the GIS guys mapped all of the different plans that apply to the Northside/Westside neighborhood. And it's crazy. There's like 11 plans that overlap with this one single neighborhood. It's just a lot of layers.

And the MRA, they say, has not done a good job of showing the public how they are following City policy.

MRA may think they are executing City policy but it's not always clear what they are supporting.

Goals would help with process, they say, in narrowing down and prioritizing projects.

Back in the eighties and nineties, the MRA, the primary goal for the City and the MRA was to revitalize our Downtown, bring businesses to Missoula revamp and strengthen our economy. We have done that pretty successfully. We are a very desirable place to live now and work. And so now it has shifted to how do we provide housing and some of those social infrastructure needs that haven't been a priority for a while. And now it's elevated because of the need for housing. I do think that some of those projects should be weighed differently. And the ratio, the percentage of funds that go to a business versus an affordable housing developer, for example, shouldn't be ranked the same. I think that housing should be ranked higher and the funds should represent that.

An analogy is with the community development block grant money. Erin Pehan came to us a little over a year ago. That money has…mostly been spent on sidewalks in Ward 6. Her suggestion was that we narrow the focus of the use of that CDBG money just to housing issues…I was a little reluctant because I know that sidewalks helped our neighborhood quite a lot, but it was clearly stated and put to us in a way that, okay, we we've got this limited pot of money and this is what

we want to focus that use of that money on. And so, I wonder if, if we could maybe do similar with the URD. Let's set out some goals, not just for the MRA in general, but for each of the URDs.

And the community, some say, should be involved in setting those goals.

I wonder if we could approach it kind of in a similar way that sometimes we do with the neighborhood councils like, here's a list of things that could possibly be done in the next year or something like that, and can we rank them and have some community involvement in that kind of a process.

Clear goals, driven by the community, would also really help communication issues, say many Council members.

Goals help communication because people are less worried that their taxes are going up to fund random projects.

If we pulled out the main goals, like these are the boxes this project checks, people could cross-reference it easily.

If we have a shared sort of agreement of what it is that we're trying to do with this district and people are like, "Oh yes, that seems reasonable." And saying to the developer, "Okay, you have to follow these guidelines because you're getting a little bit of our money to help make sure you're achieving these goals.' Then you're able to sort of demonstrate that to folks in a way that doesn't seem so willy nilly.

> *You [can] show why a District was created, what goals were and give information [that] shows [it] wasn't a whim to help a rich developer.*

Clear goals will also set a vision that the community can get behind, they say, and metrics will provide key accountability.

> *I believe in goals and I would love to see the Mayor come out with very specific metrics of success and clear ways to achieve them.*
>
> *Goals and metrics will allow people to think, "So now I understand what it takes to be successful. What can I do as a part of this project to help put a man on the moon? What is our north star?" I want a vision…I would very much love to see, we want to be able to do X, Y, and Z.*

But some Council members say that the MRA's use of TIF is inherently flawed. While most City Council members are mostly in support of the the MRA and its use of TIF, a group of three members have publicly expressed disapproval with the tool, although one of these members did point to the Sawmill District as a "pretty good TIF project."

> *I think [Old Sawmill District] was a good TIF project in a lot of respects because you did have an area that was essentially a Superfund site. We had the City building a road there that is used for the community. It's not on a private piece of property. It's used for the public to commute from one side to the other, between Russell and Orange Street[s]. We put in that public piece of infrastructure, not ideal for me, I'd rather have them pay for it, but…I think that has been a success because it has led to more housing that ordinarily would not have been there because the City had skin in the game. So, they were able to allow more development…*

A few Council members have a list of issues concerning the MRA and its use of TIF. The number one complaint by Council members who view TIF negatively is that it increases taxes.

Their argument claims that increased development creates growth, which creates a need for City services but because new tax money derived from development is diverted into TIF, there is no additional revenue in the general fund to pay for increased services. This, they said, strains the general operational budget which requires the City to raise taxes to cover new the expenses. That, they said, means other districts pay for the additional burden.

Even when the MRA helps build affordable housing with TIF dollars, some Council members say, it creates a bigger problem.

> *In order to pay for this affordable housing, that money has to come from somewhere. You're taking it from people that partly afford it to give it to people that can maybe afford it. And what you're doing is you're making a self-fulfilling prophecy, and you're taxing a bunch of other people to the point where they can't afford the expenses either.*

The MRA should not keep anything in a TIF District "beyond what is necessary to service debt," they say. "They should be taking all other remittance from the MRA back to the general fund."

Other Council Members say that while some of those assertions have merit, most of them are untrue. And the ones that do have merit, they say, aren't taking everything into consideration. Taxes, for example, do slightly increase, but at the end of the District, they say, there is a windfall which will keep taxes steady for years.

> *I do think it's a little disingenuous to say that TIF doesn't impact property taxes at all. It's a more complicated analysis. When people who are pro-TIF say it doesn't affect property taxes at all, it kind of plays into that whole narrative. And it hands [detractors] and people like that exactly what they want to hear. But it does [raise taxes]. For example, say my house has $6,000 in property taxes and then a URD goes in and in the last 15 years of the URD has gone in and now as my property taxes have risen now over the years, a chunk of my house has property taxes that go to the URD. So now I'm paying $7,000 a year. MCPS takes 1/3 of the revenue I'm providing. But they are still getting $2,000, and I'm paying the top thousand into the URD. If MCPS needs another $300 or $400 to kind of cover their gap because the last 15 years costs have gone up, they're going to have to raise my taxes. They're going to have to cover the gap. And that turns into tax raises here and there to help cover it. But, on the other hand, when that URD sunsets, then there's a bonus and there should be several years where there are no tax raises because then the tank is really full.*

Critics are also ignoring the benefits that come to communities that would otherwise never be able to be paid for out of the general fund.

> *We are diverting funds to invest in something that is priming the pump, that's ultimately going to pay off in spades. But, for the first 20 to 30 years, yeah, it's a diversion. And when you divert something, you're going to have to backfill that somehow, some way. So that's the way I would characterize it, but it's worth the investment.*

> *The idea is that you're investing for the future of our town and ultimately the payback's going to be bigger…when you have that level of investment in an area, it has a domino effect all around.*

> *The whole downtown trail system, was basically built out by the MRA as well as the trail that connects it that goes behind Draughtworks, and all of these community assets—people just don't even bring the two together. It's not a thing they think of. Or the pedestrian bridge over the railroad track—that was MRA funds in large part, too. It's all of these huge infrastructure pieces that would not be here otherwise.*

City Councils exploring other ways to make TIF more equitable including a cap that would reimburse the general fund once revenues hit a certain point. But, they say, it is complicated. Caps can be dangerous because they are arbitrary and could keep the MRA from having the flexibility to fund opportunities that come up. There is even some question of whether the state legislature will create a cap, which will really affect the MRA's ability to fund affordable housing.

> *The legislature very well could easily cap it. I'm hearing proposals of 5%, which is going to be a huge impact to us because we have actually situated ourselves by all of these investments, in these TIFs, in these URDs and setting up this entire structure, we are positioned to pump some major money into affordable housing. But if we are capped at 5%, we are just servicing bonds. We're doing a few small projects. We're doing some sidewalks. We are not doing significant affordable housing…it really changes your trajectory hugely.*

And, say many Council members, the real problem is a need for tax reform in general.

> *The parallel topic to all of this, of course, is tax reform. The discussion regarding TIF has amplified as property taxes have gone up and people are correlating the two together. You've got TIF, you've got bonds. There's a lot of little pieces, which have caused some rise in taxes. But the majority of it is the change in our tax base and the change in legislative laws has pared back all sorts of other taxes. And the fact that we did not have a diverse tax base at this point, it's pretty much residential is what's really the workhorse now. And it used to be commercial and industry. And it's a huge, long conversation. Tax reform is the big issue. TIF is a secondary issue, but people equate the two.*

Critics also say that the City and MRA use people's confusion with the intricacies of the tool to push things through that the public might not agree with.

> *In my opinion, it's typical government where they hide behind the guise of complexity, and they get away with so much. The public doesn't understand what is actually going on and they just explain it like, "Oh yeah, we invested $20 million bucks and then we got $200 million of investment. What's not to love?" People don't understand.*

That's not true, say others. The issue is just a lack of good communication from the MRA, Council and the City.

> *I think that the frustration that the majority members on Council have is that [critics] have figured out, is the fact that we, as progressives, don't really succinctly explain things and demonstrate their value. And the other side is so quick to easily demonize them in little sound bites that everyone then can regurgitate, even if they don't actually know what that means.*

> *It's the MRA but also the City. If a business [communicated this badly], they would lose all of their customers. And yet here we are. And how can we imagine we could do better if we don't communicate with folks. It's an absolute mess.*

We need to have communications and education outreach, but it needs to be like super, super, like basic and, and easy to understand.

[The MRA website] is cumbersome. I would never say that it's not a transparent process because I think all the information is there but finding it and using it is, for the average person, incredibly difficult, challenging, and you just give up.

Critics also say that there is a bait and switch going on. One Council member claims that districts are "meant to do one thing but actually do something quite different." The main issue, they say, is with districts that never seem to sunset.

> *There's a small provision in Montana code annotated that states, if you sell debt within the [urban renewal] district, it extends the district out to the length of the bonds for a max of 25 additional years, total district max of 40 years. So, it's supposed to be something that you use sparingly, and, in this case, it's used in every single district. We haven't had a district sunset after 15 years since MRA has been created and all these districts are maxed out.*

Yes, say other Council members, we have had to extend the life of the URDs, which is unfortunate. But the lifespan of a URD needs to accommodate for the time it takes to "prime the pump" by increasing the tax base with private developments so that the MRA can then have the money to fund more public projects like housing, infrastructure, and parks.

> *Developer projects immediately start generating money into the district that then frees up money to then start doing projects that may not have the same return on investment, like purchasing the Sleepy Inn, some of the stuff at the Scott Street project. We now have enough money in those districts to start doing the community work, but we had to generate the income into the district to do that. And I'm excited to see those come to fruition and be able to tell those stories to the community to then be like, it's because of this, we're able to do this.*

Critics on Council also say the MRA isn't being straight with the public on the cost of interest on the debt.

> *What the City never brings up and what the MRA never brings up is the total cost to the taxpayers. They never bring that up. They're completely leaving out the debt. The interest on the debt is huge. So if you say something costs a million dollars, maybe the total cost of taxpayers is $1.5, $1.6 million bonded over 25 years, depending on the amortization schedule....it's very substantial what that interest is. And that's all fronted by the taxpayer.*

TIF is very interesting because TIF is, in fact, property taxes. But because they're counting everything above and beyond that as revenues to the District, instead of property taxes, it allows them to get around the whole pesky democracy thing of having to have people vote on debt.

Because URDs keep getting extended, say critics, "citizens are losing on the time value of their money." Corporations, they say, benefit immediately from TIF investments, while citizens, "have to wait 20-30 years for their payoff."

> *How many years is it until we can actually see that money go for the police, the fire, the schools, the infrastructure? It's going to be decades. And in most of these cases, I mean, anything in urban renewal district three is still 20 years out from that money actually going into the general fund for the public good in any of those areas. And then when something expires, then there's some money that goes into it, but most of the people have moved or have passed on that were paying the taxes in the first place."*

Again, say other Council members, the extended life cycles are hard for people who want immediate results. But that's just not how big projects work, they say.

An unfortunate fact is that a lot of our Districts are going to sunset really far out. We've got one coming up in the late 2020s. People can't mentally grasp that. They need to see an investment that pays off somewhat close to their lifetime, or at least some of it needs to pay off. So psychologically, it's hard. And I think that's caused some of this friction. They need to know that this whole priming the pump concept can take easily 15 to 20 years. So, as you finally start to hit your stride, then it's supposed to sunset, or you can spread the bonding payments out and that's how you get a big project done.

Think about it this way, the hotel Downtown when it was empty was paying $15,000 a year in taxes. And now it's over $500,000 a year. So yes, that's tied up for a period of time as it's being reinvested. But when that comes out, they could be paying a million dollars a year in taxes flooding back in.

The long pay-off cycle with TIF, say detractors on Council, also shifts more risks away from developers and onto citizens.

For 40 years, we the citizens are suffering a loss because we get the increase in people that are using increased services in those Districts. We're bearing the brunt of it. Meanwhile, the corporation gets it right away.

The MRA is not subsidizing the developers, say other Council members. In fact, no money goes to the developers for any part of the project except work for the direct benefit of the public.. "It's a municipal financing tool that allows us to do infrastructure work in the public for the public benefit." Taxpayers, are not on the hook and developers do not get the money up front. They have to complete all the work, prove that they did the work necessary for TIF funding and then get reimbursed. It is actually the developers that are on the hook.

It's not giving money to developers. It's making sure that developers do things the way we want them to do it. We're making sure that the City's interests are also considered and by the City I mean the community members' interests are considered with these projects and that there's something good that comes out of it for the community.

Some critics question the usefulness of TIF and believe that it was a good tool when it was first implemented in Missoula but that it is has long since become antiquated. But Missoula is booming. Businesses and workers are moving here in great numbers and bringing a "lot of money" to Missoula. They see the use of TIF to address blight as very narrowly defined and do not believe that Missoula "needs" the tool anymore. They say the MRA is pointing to economic growth because of TIF investment when it would have happened "on its own."

They've already admitted that these developments would have happened anyways, but then they're trying to claim credit for all of it, with the TIF money. It's like, okay, maybe you got to expand a little bit or maybe get them to put solar panels on or something, but you can't lie with those numbers. That's not right to do to the public.

Again, other Council members disagree. That line of thinking is shortsighted, they say. MRA's use of TIF helps keep our community from "becoming Bozeman or Boulder" because it follows the intentions of TIF legislation, which are to create more equal opportunities for economic prosperity in the communities that need it.

Some will say that because Missoula is doing well and because property values are doing well, we don't need TIF. For whom is it doing well? How can we use TIF to make it do right by the people who are being left behind? How can we build housing? How can we

create opportunities? How can we really use TIF as an investment tool for everyone in our community who really needs that investment?

In one context Missoula's been discovered. People are going to come here. Companies are relocating to our community. Maybe just as an economic development tool TIF isn't as needed. But it's still needed for achieving community goals and standards. It forces people that want MRA money to meet the values of the community that they're developing."

All of the things that are in the statute of getting rid of blight, of improving the health and well-being of the community members, seeing amenities that otherwise wouldn't exist, be part of our communities...it's having things that protect the most vulnerable in our community.

There has been a shift in how municipalities use TIF. It has gone from excising blight to remediating obsolescence. That's a great way of phrasing it. There's no paint peeling on this, no, but it's obsolete. Our mall, frankly, was obsolete. And we need to reframe how we are thinking about projects.

When asked about the use of TIF money to make development projects better for the community by paying for things like wider sidewalks, infrastructure, lighting—things that are for the public good—critics on Council dismiss that idea by saying that those things are not actually what TIF pays for and that what TIF pays for should be paid for by the developer.

" *The vast majority of TIF money, especially in the case that we see with the Marriott, is actually used for demolition and deconstruction and demolition and deconstruction is something that is typically fronted by the developer and every sort of urban developer in the world. I mean, that's what you do.*

Not true, say other Council members. Developers do demolition but not deconstruction. Typically, all that waste goes straight to the landfill.

> *When the City passed its Zero Waste by 50 initiative that had broad community support. The developer of the Merc wasn't going to do deconstruction. They didn't want to wait for that process. It wasn't like we just cut a check to the developer. We paid for the deconstruction because we, as a community, decided that we have a zero-waste initiative, and these bricks went there and these pillars went there and they now are like living a second life versus just rotting in the landfill.*

> **If you demolish something versus deconstructing, deconstruction takes longer. It takes more labor but less goes into the landfill. And, ultimately, it's better for climate change and the environment all around. If you divert out of the landfill and reuse that stuff. Deconstruction costs more and businesspeople care about the bottom line. That's what you're looking at. But if MRA comes in and makes up the difference there…environmentalists should be all over this.**

Proponents on Council say the MRA uses TIF to make sure developments include benefits to the public that just would not happen otherwise.

> *It's a free market tool. And that's the part that I feel like people don't understand—it's a way of leveraging a development that's already happening for public benefit where otherwise we would get nothing. Well, not nothing. We would get a lot less without that tool.*

> *What we're actually spending the money on is infrastructure. It's sidewalks. It's things like deconstruction versus demolition. It's undergrounding utilities. Those are the things we're putting the money in.*

> *The connection of Mary Street is one of the most amazing things we've done. We as a community, not Council, because we don't get streets. We give away right of ways most of the time, so building out those things is a big deal and I don't why the negative rhetoric dominates so much. Because those are big changes in our physical environment that are for the better, really.*

However, say some supporters of the MRA, there is room for improvement with policy.

> "We should not be subsidizing a [developer]. We should be putting extra resources there so that they build a better project than they would otherwise. That goes to the deconstruction as well as sidewalks. The way we do it currently, I think with the Merc, we paid for the sidewalks. Well, if this was not an a URD, [the developer] would have to put sidewalks in under our regulations. They just wouldn't be as nice or as big or have as much good stuff on them as they do with [MRA involved]. So, so we need to change our policies so that [the developer] pays for the eight-foot sidewalk that he needs to put in. And then we put in whatever beyond that.
>
> [The developer] doesn't have to put all that fancy stuff in, but he does have to put in basic sidewalks. And right now, he's getting a little bit of a windfall because we did all the sidewalks because that's been MRA policy. So that's a policy issue. And then the deconstruction. Yes, they're going to have to pay something to demolish. So then on top of that, for deconstruction, we should make up the difference. If the demolition takes six weeks and deconstruction takes four months, that is more money the developer must pay. I don't have a good answer for that, but maybe just through community pressure, they opt for the deconstruction to keep everybody happier than not happy.

Critics say that promoting tourism is causing people to move to Missoula and push out people that already live here. They see the rapid growth happening in Missoula and claim that TIF investments lead to communities where only wealthy people can own property and do business. They do not like the types of businesses that are funded by TIF money and think the incentives are turning Missoula into a place with a large wealth gap like Bozeman, Montana or Boulder, Colorado.

> "The vast majority of businesses funded with TIF money are those that pay their workers absolute crap. I mean, you talk about the tourism business. You talk about hotel workers, you talk about people that work at the mall, you talk about these various types of other kinds of jobs that are created I don't get why we're incentivizing companies that pay their workers absolute crap, just stuff that you cannot afford to live on.
>
> And it seems like the majority of people are older people, you know, they've worked all their life, they paid their house off and now these taxes, that's the sad part. I hate to see that happen. And, unfortunately, that's exactly what happened in Boulder, Colorado. The prices went through the roof, they felt they had to get out or they couldn't pay the taxes anymore and lost everything. And I'd just hate to see that happen here.

They point to the inequities of TIF allocation and say that TIF creates an unfair playing field for those residents who don't live in a URD. "Some small amount of money goes to things like sidewalks" in URDS. But in non URDs, they point out, "we charge homeowners for sidewalks. And we pay for sidewalks for big corporations."

Again, say supporters on Council, that view is shortsighted. Improvements in one part of town, they say, benefit everyone.

> *Let's talk about pulling the plug on TIF. How do you expect the next round of investment to happen and where should that investment actually occur? Republicans and Democrats alike, we're always talking about good paying jobs. So, if we don't have an economic development tool, how does it create more jobs? We have to be able to expand their businesses. That's how you grow a business. Growth is dependent upon consumers by and large. Who is using your product or service? And where are those people going to live? Where are they going to get their healthcare from? Where are they going to convene when they want to protest? Where are they going to go for schools? All of that is truly reliant upon the action of economic development."*

All of these misconceptions, say other Council members, are coming from fear. Fear of growth and fear of change are causing people to look for a scapegoat, and some people are using MRA and its use of TIF for political motives. Growth is happening, they say, and MRA is working to get ahead of it and create intentional development that serves the community, not the developers.

> *Fear of change is driving a lot of the criticism. We need to frame growth more carefully and honestly. It's not just that we are building 3,000 new homes but that we are creating and investing in developing more neighborhoods. Because neighborhoods mean coffee shops and parks and other good things.*
>
> *One of the things I talk about all the time with folks, is I appreciate you telling us how you feel and that you're worried about growth. But let me ask you this, did you build your house? No. Did you develop the house? No. Well, there you have it. That's economic development, right? Someone had to come along and actually build, put in the infrastructure, put in the sidewalks, put in the yard, build the house. And here you are with a roof over your head. And either we can demonize all developers or we actually realize that the roof over our head—that we are so grateful for—is because of a developer of the past. Someone who saw an opportunity that did not just make a quick buck themselves, if you will, but create a legacy so that you can share the community with me.*

Critics are also unhappy with the o the Mayor's use of TIF revenues to balance the City's Budget.

> *He's getting a hundred cents on the dollar for every growth in property tax base. And they've refused to share it with the County and the schools and the City general funds. So, he can have his own kind of little fund that he can do stuff that he's always wanted to do. I'm not blaming him. …that's his prerogative. We just need to make sure that every tax dollar is being spent efficiently though, not taxing people out of their houses.*

Other Council members say that's just not true. When the Mayor pulled money out of TIF to help with the budget, they say, "the money was allocated to everyone as usual. Thirty percent went to the City. Twenty percent went to the County. And the rest went to the schools." In fact, the money being spent from TIF funds is way more transparent than it would be if it were coming from the general fund.

> *The creation of an Urban Renewal District, allows for that transparency, allows for that accountability—that if you invest in this, you can expect to see some results over an extended period of time, but you have more of that accountability. If it goes into the general fund, it can be diluted…that ability to be opportunistic and nimble, goes away.*

Some members of Council who are against the MRA's use of TIF believe that the issue is really a bigger question of the role of government. The problem, they say, comes, in part, from out-of-staters.

> *Essentially, they [MRA, Destination Missoula, MEP, etc.,] market us to these rich out-of-staters and they come in here and make the Missoulians, the locals, their servants. They can come in and buy a house in cash for a hundred thousand dollars over asking price, further driving up the cost. So, this is called the result of a parasitic economy.*

The solution, they say, is less government, not more. Local governments, they say, do things with good intentions but "absolutely do not help anything. In fact, they make it 10 times worse."

The only thing the government has to do is get the hell out of the way.

"That would be a disaster," say other Council members. Private development left unchecked would completely change the nature of Missoula and would lead to a deepening housing crisis, a lack of parks and trails, a growing divide in our equity gap, and a total lack of community infrastructure.

[TIF] is the one tool we have to really invest in our community. We cannot just see how it turns out and leave it completely to market forces—talk about letting go of the reins. Or we can use our one tool to try and make sure that any gaps we see that need to be filled are filled. To me, MRA gives us control over things and that's change control. We want to control the change as best as we can.

MRA money comes with a lot of strings, and those strings are good. They're there for a reason. From requiring deconstruction to requiring certain wage rates for staff that is working on those funded portions of a project. There are a lot of things that people have to meet to get that money. It's actually a pretty high bar and it's good. I just think that you can't just criticize the MRA for where and how they spend their money, if you aren't in some way, directing that spending.

I don't have to agree with everything they support or do, it's not my job. But in many ways, they [the MRA] are safeguarding that public space. So maybe I didn't love the Merc, but, because they have MRA funding in it, it's a lot better. And I also think we need it because it allows the City to invest in things like sidewalks and trails and affordable housing and parks and the public library or these spaces that there really isn't enough funding for. The private market is not going to invest in those spaces on its own. And this is one way of capturing the impact that private development is having for those public benefits. So, it's probably just as needed now, maybe even more.

In terms of communication, most Council members, even detractors, say that the MRA does a good job with orientation for new Council members. They all praised MRA's tours for new Council members. But they would still like more internal information.

But when it comes to communicating with the public, they say that the MRA needs to "get more information to community members" and "do a better job of telling their story.

> *MRA is not out in public in any meaningful way.*

> *I just don't think we're controlling the message at all.*

> *This is largely true of the City in general. I think that they do a lousy job communicating about the projects they do, both in real time with the media.*

Many Council members say that there needs to be a mindset shift at MRA, but also at the City, about the importance of communications and the need to build capacity. Currently, the City has one communications person and that person actually just represents the Mayor's office. They do a good job, say Council members, but the scope is just too big for one person. Most Council members see the need for a full-time communications director at MRA but, they say, ideally, there would be a full communications department at the City level.

> *The City has generally approached communicating from a scarcity mindset. Communicating takes time, energy, money. They would rather do programmatic stuff than increase communication capacity.*

> *The City as a whole needs a communication department… there are so many stories to tell of the passionate people doing great work at the City.*

> *I'm always going to support a communications division because I think it's so important for people to understand. They can then form their opinions, whether it's in support or against it, but it'll be a well-educated, well-informed decision in my opinion. I do think that there might be ways to have that position be more than just for the MRA. To be completely honest, I think the entire City needs more people in the communication field to be working for the City.*

The City doesn't have enough capacity to communicate properly. One person can't do it all. [The current person] needs help. MRA and the City need communication help, and it's a capacity issue.

We need a communications person, maybe at the City level, because the problem goes beyond TIF. People don't understand the system of government.

We definitely need more capacity… being proactive with the community and the press. I'm just not sure where that sits.

That department, says one Council member, should include engagement personnel in addition to communications people, who, they say, are more "outward facing." An "engagement person would be good," they say, "because they could give Council members a head's up and keep us informed."

Council members also emphasize that they keep hearing MRA staff and Board members talk about a need to "educate" the public on TIF, which is missing many of the problems and opportunities, they say.

> *It is not all education. There is an understandable defensive posture that has constantly been the fallback. And it's come from Council members too, that if we only educated, the public…I've never been particularly fond of that. For one, it sounds a little obnoxious. I think I have always thought of it as a communication, but there are absolutely some structural aspects to it.*

Council members have many ideas for how to improve communication, most of which are reflected in the recommendations section of this report. The main recommendation is a shift in messaging to really focus on the public benefit of projects.

> *Whenever possible, make sure that the projects that we're investing in are that the public benefit is crystal clear.*

Council members also want case studies, a new website, a more proactive approach to dealing with the press, and a desperate need for better community engagement.

Case studies, say Council members, would really help break down the complexities of TIF and show the public benefit.

> *We need a library of stuff that they've [MRA] done that the public can go to and see. It's a documentation thing. It's just unacceptable to be honest, and if I'm really serious about it, given the money invested by the public, it is literally unacceptable that we don't have one.*

> *I would like to see us having more of the feel-good stories about the health clinic and the Food Bank… to reflect on these decisions that we've made.*

> *How can we get people to tell how they benefit by receiving TIF? They benefit not just themselves but the community…and what that contribution means on different levels. I know that some people have received MRA funds to connect to sewer and sidewalks and maybe have those stories of how people who have received that are the average Joes. And have them talk about what it meant to them to receive those funds.*

Most Council members also complain about the website. Information is there, they say, but is impossible to find. It doesn't "tell the stories." It is "difficult to navigate," and "it doesn't show data or any benefit to the public." Interviewees say that is true of the City site as a whole and that the City could use a better website but that it is particularly crucial for the MRA.

> *It [the website] is cumbersome to try to find information. I would never say that it's not a transparent process because all the information is there but finding it and using it is for the average person is incredibly difficult. It's so challenging that you just give up.*

> *I would totally retool the website, make it engaging and user-friendly which is the opposite of what it is now.*

I remember when I was running for Council trying to get information [from the website] so that, while canvassing, I could inform people and demystify what TIF is all about. It was really hard.

In terms of press, many Council members are frustrated by the coverage in local media. They feel like most reporters are just out to find the "hot buttons" and are not covering all the good work that the MRA does. They say part of the problem is that the MRA and the City are always on the defensive. They should be "getting ahead" of stories, they say, and being more "proactive" and "less reactive."

> *Certain projects just get so much attention in the press. [The media] only covers the ones that people know about that make people mad instead of talking about all the projects that we've done that have been really great.*

I don't think a lot about how we're communicating is working right now. Instead of being proactive about it, we're reactive about it, and I don't think that's working and I think we're just hoping the press picks up great little tidbits that we say or great little meetings. I know there's some press releases but we're just way too reactive.

Then there's this thing about how there's no transparency, right. It fosters that paranoia about what we're doing. And then people get a little tidbit about the hotel instead of the great story about the park and the press is not always very accurate about it. There are some that are better than others, but regularly these stories are inaccurate or when you read them, they're skewed one direction. We need to be controlling the message and being proactive about it instead of what we're doing, because what we're doing is absolutely not working.

Many Council members say it is crucial that there is more successful community engagement because there needs to be more of a "community mandate" around MRA's use of TIF to keep it as a successful tool.

There needs to be a little bit more community mandate for this money to be spent in this way. We've gone through all of the correct hoops and jumped through everything, but the community doesn't feel like it has the mandate. And, in the meantime, as this has grown exponentially and is now significant, that's not a comfortable place to be in public arena if we don't. I think we have the public mandate in general, but they need some more specifics now given the significance of this program.

Members say that real engagement is important because they only get a limited view of what the community things during public comment during meetings.

We don't know everything that the community wants, but I would say that one of the things that feels like an overarching goal is that they want more equity, better housing…but what the community wants is always a hard question because there are certain people that are really loud and other people that are not, and trying to filter through that is…that's kind of my job…but it's also a hard job because there's a lot of quiet people that you don't really know what they want until you're at their door.

Most Council members say that public engagement needs to be improved throughout the City but that MRA, in particular, doesn't have many avenues for it.

Honestly, the MRA does not invite public comment in a way that makes it easy for people possible to figure out how to do it.

Part of that, they say, is that incorporating community feedback on individual projects would not be logistically possible. They don't see how the community could be involved or even if the community should be involved with the details of every project.

I think there's a lot of broad level input people can have. We can say we value deconstruction or zero-waste goals, we value these higher-level things. But on a project-by-project basis, it's a lot harderfor there to be community input or if it's even appropriate at that level.

The reality is that as much public engagement as there is, the effect of it is somewhat limited because you can't really tell people [developers] what to do to an extent. Unless they're asking for MRA money and then you can have a little bit more sway.

But, they say, engagement around goals and higher-level strategy is crucial. The biggest issue with the MRA's use of TIF, say many Council members, is an issue that is affecting all City departments, people do not feel heard.

People do not feel heard. They need to feel included in the process.

I think that the groundswell resentment is that, by and large, people don't feel like they are heard. Usually, the people that get upset don't like the format in which they get to talk to us councilors and how regimented it is and formal. And you only get three minutes to talk …so, it just seems like there's not a flow.

Even if the news is not good or there is nothing that the City can do, people still want to voice their opinions to and get information from elected representatives and City agencies.

People just want to feel like they have an avenue to be heard. Me knocking on their door, and listening — even about things I can't do anything about.

Right now, they say, all communication from the MRA, and even the City seems to be one-way, just sending out information but not trying to have a dialogue with the community.

For a long time, our way of communicating has been centered around press releases and informing the public rather than engaging in a conversation that informs the process and allows us to tweak it if we need to. Instead, it's been very newspaper-like. It's here's what the City's doing, and here's what MRA is doing. There have got to be many ways in which we can have that conversation, that dialogue.

The City, they say, "needs to do a better job of creating feedback loops so that the community feels their input is valued and proactively solicited." Some Council members, they say, do a better job of creating those loops for their constituents but, mostly, they all have a long way to go. But when they do provide avenues for engagement, projects are more successful.

Because of the outreach that was done [on the Downtown Master Plan], we had a richer project and people felt bought in. They may not have gotten everything they wanted, but they felt like they were at least included in the process. It is hard to do in a community as big as ours and as growing in diversity, but really trying to keep to doing that more, I think would help with some of the divisiveness that people feel.

The process as it is now, they say, only allows for public comment and that only comes after it is basically too late to make changes.

There needs to be some kind of constructive, interim engagement prior to that to be part of the equation. When we have a public hearing and we've worked on something for three months, and then the last night that we're finishing it up and somebody comes in with comments, we're not steering the ship in a new direction now.

Community engagement for URDs only happens at the beginning of the URD. But, over time, say some Council members, the priorities of the community change and there is no mechanism to accommodate for that.

> *There is a lifespan to the District and the needs and priorities in the District evolve over time. And it may not be that the total set of priorities changes, but it is reasonable to believe that the weight on particular priorities within the district change.*

> *The planning process has lots of room for engagement in the beginning but there's a lifecycle analysis that is missing. Is there an opportunity to reassess and update plans like the transportation and growth plans?*

One suggestion was a regular open house (every four or five years) where the MRA can present to community about what has been done and get feedback on priorities.

> *A regular open house makes a lot of sense, having more of a plan in place for each URD. I think that all of planning gets done at the very beginning and then it just sits there on the shelf. I like that idea of kind of revisiting that.*

Another idea was to supplement those larger meetings by going to existing neighborhood groups and meetings.

> *Maybe quarterly have the leadership team go to meetings, maybe neighborhood council meetings, and give an update on, "Here are the urban renewal districts that fall within your neighborhood council boundary. I just want to point out that this is what's happening. This is how we are investing TIF funds in your community, etc." so that people then say, they're walking down a Franklin to the Fort neighborhood street and they're on a sidewalk they can later say, "Oh, I remember that lady that came from MRA and told me that they help pay for this"' MRA should have someone that attends those meetings on a regular basis to continue to put out that information, but also to receive information about what's being needed and what's wanted by that neighborhood.*

But be careful, say some members. The Mayor and the City, they say, rely too much on neighborhood councils which are not necessarily representative of all the people of the neighborhood.

Some neighborhood councils are better about that than other neighborhood councils, but I think that the Mayor's office and the City rely too much on the neighborhood councils to be the source of that when there is a huge discrepancy about kind of what those look like, who shows up, how engaged, how it disseminates information.

Many people, including renters and members of the Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community are not involved or engaged with the neighborhood councils.

I have learned that a lot of people, especially BIPOC members of the community don't attend those meetings. I think there is this idea that you have to be a homeowner to be invested in your neighborhood. And so, you're not capturing everyone who should be part of that voice at t hose meetings.

And, they say, serious work needs to be done to figure out how to engage with all of our community.

We need to figure out how to engage the BIPOC community because we need that engagement. We don't do a good job of reaching out to people and asking them to participate. My voice is important to this process.

Most importantly, say some Council members, is a dedication to doing real community engagement. This, they say, involves both a shift in thinking and priorities. It starts with listening first before telling.

As leaders, we need to listen, not tell people what we think or try to convince them… just practice deep empathy.

And then realizing that creating avenues for community engagement takes time and a lot of effort. But is the only real way to address the growing controversy over the MRA's use of TIF.

Everyone comes to me for a quick fix on community engagement. There isn't one.

I hear all these different dynamics… 'I have another job. I don't have time." And I feel like everyone's looking for that easy solution. My frustration is that there is no easy way to do community engagement. Now with the added, "Oh, LEARN is going to teach us how to reach out to the BIPOC community." No. It doesn't work like that. We need to build the capacity and commit the resources. It's our only way to change this dynamic.

FULL COMMUNITY SUMMARY

Community interviewees agreed that the MRA has done great work. Many point to past projects, especially Caras Park and the revitalization of Downtown Missoula as solid examples of addressing blight and creating much needed economic development.

> *If it weren't for Tax Increment Financing, Downtown Missoula would not be the vibrant city center that it is…every building in the District has had some sort of TIF investment …if it weren't for Tax Increment Financing, we wouldn't have the Carousel. We wouldn't have Caras Park. We wouldn't have the Riverfront trail system…and those have benefited so many people in the community.*

> *When they established that first Urban Renewal District in Downtown…it was full of blight and it's so vibrant now… you had to have some incentive to make that happen. And TIF provided that incentive. it has been critical to see some of this, this renewal happen in our communities.*

Many also point to the MRA as being crucial during the recession of 2010 and in helping determine the course of economic recovery in Missoula.

> *We were in a situation in 2010, the depths of recession. We had Smurfit Stone close, Macy's shut its doors, and…we wanted to recruit and retain businesses and we largely weren't in the game in either arena.*

> *We developed street sections with sidewalks, safe routes to school, safe crossings, boulevards. None of that would've happened without the TIF District. So, it made that community much, much nicer, much safer for the pedestrians, especially the kids. And it was during a time where there wasn't a lot going on. It was through the recession. So, it put all kinds of people to work.*

Some interviewees think that most people are content with the MRA's use of TIF and that those who are upset are just more vocal.

I think most people are happy with it and understand the benefit of TIF and the MRA. I think that there is a lot of air space taken up by people that are angry about it, that don't understand it, that think it's a conspiracy theory.

I don't think there's very many people that understand it, or have had a reason to understand it so, I think the population of who understands it is probably pretty small. And I think the people that don't like it is very small. They're just vocal.

So, I've got about an 80/20 rule that seems to work pretty well. 80% of folks don't care. They're, assuming that the City knows what it is and how it works, and they may hear a little noise now and again, or if there's a specific project that piques their interest, they might become engaged or pay some attention.

But others say they see trouble ahead if the MRA doesn't do anything to address problems with the process and address misunderstandings and misinformation.

The community issues with TIF started on the far right and far left but have crept towards the middle. There has been so much misinformation put out there. And now with our housing crisis, our wage crisis, and this huge influx of new people into our community, people are on edge. MRA needs to get a handle on this.

We have an income inequity situation. And I do think we need to be careful. I mean, that's the world we're in at this point. The people that have resources are going to continue to have those and the people that don't are further behind and the sensitivity around this is pretty intense…so it may be, it's going to gentrify, but do you want it gentrified with no public parks and no workforce housing? Or do you want to try and make it more equitable using TIF as an equity tool as opposed to a gentrification tool?

Most interviewees also say they believe that community concern about the MRA and its use of TIF must be viewed as part of the broader political context in the United States.

TIF was for a long time, fairly uncontroversial. We're now at a point, of course, when government in general has come under closer scrutiny, when the idea of paying taxes is itself, not easily accepted and certainly, we've moved slowly and fairly steadily into an anti-tax, anti-government context. I think it would be surprising if this mechanism hadn't come up for closer scrutiny.

It doesn't matter what you say to McConnell. He ain't going to change his mind. It doesn't matter what you say to Schumer. He ain't going to change his mind. They're going to take whatever side of the issue suits them for the minute. It's so distressing and I think that TIF may be in that category. Your opinion of TIF is going to be more controlled by your political predisposition than the facts.

And even locally, they say, issues with the MRA's use of TIF are based on larger political anxieties.

The anxiety on the far left is that this is only benefiting rich people. The anxiety on the far right, is that this is just another way that governments are taking more control than they should and spending more money than they should.

Some point to the urban/rural divide about the use of TIF, citing a greater opposition to TIF at the state level because "rural communities don't understand TIF" because "it's utilized more in urban areas than in rural areas."

And some say that concern around TIF is manufactured for political purposes—that politicians are using it to get votes.

There is a small but vocal group who have drawn a lot of attention to the notion of TIF— sometimes with misinformation or simple misunderstanding—and a few folks that have tried to weaponize it.

Most people interviewed also point out that not all the issues are specific to the MRA's use of TIF. Some of the animosity toward the use of TIF is coming from a larger discontent with City government.. They say that "If you've ever had a bad experience with government, the whole City gets painted with that brush."

There's definitely a sector in Missoula that's a lot bigger than a lot of progressive folks want to accept maybe or are aware of…of folks that really don't like how the government is doing some of those funding things. And TIF has been the tip of the iceberg.

The City needs a better user experience like how [Parks and Recreation] thinks about people enjoying parks. Right now, the user experience is not great in all departments and people are getting frustrated. Then they hate government. And then that translates to hating MRA and hating TIF. One bad user experience in any City department makes everything suffer.

But interviewees agree that criticism must be considered and taken as an opportunity for the MRA to build and strengthen trust with the community. There was consensus among interviewees that the MRA, City Council, and leadership at the City should be "asking hard questions about TIF and looking seriously at criticism."

Frankly, I think part of the long-term strategy of defending TIF is to acknowledge that there are some honest questions that people can ask about this. It's not like it's a divinely ordained mechanism. Like most things, and maybe more than that most forms of public policy, reasonable people could disagree about it. I think it's fair to ask.

We need to listen to [people opposed to TIF] very closely and see what part of their argument is legitimate that we can maybe fix or take off the table …we could just look at it in that lens and just see if there's anything we can make it more palatable or acceptable.

I think there would be value in conducting some focus groups where it would really give a cross section of people a chance to say, "well, here's something I just don't get, like why does Stockman Bank need this help? Why did these big businesses need this help?" a genuinely open approach to public opinion would probably point to some uses of Tax Increment Financing that are going to be harder to defend maybe, which begin to divert away from that to what has broader, stronger support. It would be surprising if we couldn't get some guidance in that way.

BOARD AND STAFF

Most community members who were interviewed also have high praise for members of the Board and staff.

I want to make sure it's on the record I think they're amazing. I do think Ellen and the entire team are absolutely like, it's incredible to watch them.

One interviewee pointed out that the Board is working toward being more diverse.

There was a time when I kind of felt like the MRA was sort of an old school Board and you had to be a man of a certain nature to be on the Board, but that's completely changed. And now it's prominently made up of women…and more younger people and not just people over 60. They've done a lot of work there. I don't know if that was their intention or not, but I think new people bring new thoughts and ideas. There's value in that.

But many expressed a need for more diversity on the Board and with staff.

You need to hire people of color. You need to hire LGBT people. You need to hire people who have that answer (how to do community outreach that is more diverse). So that person, as a hetero, cisgender, white person, doesn't know because it's not their place. It's not their community. And the only way that they're going to be able to do that

is to actually hire people from those communities. You can't say as an outsider, I need you to let me in. No, hire someone from within that community and let them tell you how.

I would like to know more about the Board of directors and what kind of approach they take to engage everyday people to be on the Board. For example, I would be surprised if any of their Board members are renters or people who live within the urban renewal districts. So, I wonder who is representing and making decisions for this agency on behalf of the community? It doesn't seem like everyday people. And that's probably why folks feel very distanced from the decision-making.

The demonstrated lack of diversity in the staff, Board, and developers on a number of levels – economic and geographic as well as race and other protected classes – contributes to citizens feeling "very distanced from the decision making."

The only people that I've ever heard talk about TIF are well-connected white people.

When I think about who's in the space doing development work, it doesn't feel diverse to me. I don't really hang with all these conventional developers, but when the Mullan Road master plan was underway, they were a bunch of white dudes.

Many interviewees asked about prioritizing local businesses over corporations and giving preferences to minority owned and disadvantaged businesses as ways to bring diversity to the work.

Remember when they helped Starbucks on Brooks and people were like, "we shouldn't be using tax increment financing to fund a corporation". That's where I think there's a lack of understanding of how narrow they can or should be. Can MRA actually have priorities? Can MRA have priorities where they would fund a majority owned local business over a corporation? Can they have priorities where disadvantaged businesses and women-owned businesses get preference? Because we use federal funds and when we get a federal grant, we have to make sure that we're reaching out to that big old database and show proof of that every single time.

City officials say they are "working hard to develop partners who are in lockstep with City goals," but that there is still much work to be done. The City is working with LEARN Missoula to address some of the systemic racism and inequities in our government. But that's not enough, said some interviewees. The MRA and the City need to stop claiming that there "just aren't any" opportunities to bring in BIPOC and LGBTQI developers and to fund projects by and for these communities.

MRA needs to be aligning actions to values. If they really are going place inclusion or now we're moving to gender justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. If they're really going to say we value that and we want to have equity and opportunity for our BIPOC community, LGBTQ, etc., their actions need to meet that value. They can't just sit back and say, "Oh, we don't know. We don't know of anyone. So, we're going to call it a day." If that's really their value, they will change the work that they do to meet that value. Or just be honest, and be like, actually that's not really our value. And then at least we know like at least we can know what to expect.

There are probably some people of color who might be interested in going after some of these opportunities regarding development, but don't understand them or don't even know they exist. I didn't even know TIF existed until this project. And I've lived here. I've read the Missoulian for years and I'm sure I probably saw it, but that's the thing is that it was the type of communication. It was aimed at people in the know. So, if there were articles about TIF, every realtor in town probably knew. But someone like me was like, I don't even know what that means. So, I'm just going to glance right over it.

I think that there are avenues (to reach out to the BIPOC community). We don't have a Native chamber here, but I mean, on campus, it seems like there are ways that we could get this information out to the community in ways that they understand that it's there and it's available. If that's what we were really interested in doing. If we're just interested in saying, "Oh, we talked to (this one BIPOC person) and so we did our job, we checked the box. That's one thing. But if we really want Native people to, and other BIPOC people to understand and take advantage of these programs, these opportunities, there's ways it could happen.

Many interviewees also brought up issues around governance. Some worry about changes to the structure of the Board.

> *I do think it would be unfortunate if we came to the place where the level of expertise, frankly, a level of wisdom that has prevailed on the MRA Board, if that came to be discounted and given less weight and that could happen. That is either the Mayor or the Council could fairly readily move in a direction of giving the Board less weight.*

There is also community perception that the Board is not really independent.

> *I understand that there is a group of five people directed by the Mayor and the City Council that told them (MRA), "Hey, let's put the money here and let's do this, let's do that." And, maybe it's a good use, but should they have that kind of power and authority over large sums of money? I think there's too many dollars going in the wrong direction and controlled by too few people.*

And many interviewees, both MRA supporters and detractors, struggle with the independent authority of the MRA Board.

Governance is a really big issue with MRA. The Board can approve money and other important things. That is wrong. Council should approve everything.

> *The only boards that are not advisory to Council are MRA and Parking. This means that they get to approve projects without Council and make personnel decisions. City Council has to approve every police car that is purchased. It is a mistake that the MRA Board does not operate like the rest. The argument that MRA makes is that it would slow things down and that they wouldn't be able to do the work that they do if they had to run everything by Council, but other departments do it every day.*

> *I think that all decisions about the economy should be made democratically.*

Others worry about changes to the structure of the Board.

It would be unfortunate if we came to the place where the level of expertise, frankly, a level of wisdom that has prevailed on the MRA Board, if that came to be discounted and given less weight and that could happen. That is either the mayor or the Council could fairly readily move in a direction of giving the Board less weight.

And some say they see a need for Succession Planning and more "outward facing leadership."

> I think that Ellen, maybe she'll do this until the end of time. I would imagine at some point she's going to want to go to concerts more than she's going to want to keep doing this. So, her retirement would be inevitable in my opinion, at some point.
>
> There's tons of talent in that office, but I hope they find a way of seeing an opportunity to bring in leadership there that sees an outward role for themselves, because I think that's ultimately, what's going to have a big change here. And I think that there's a lot of benefit to having somebody there who can be an outward face as well as a strong, inward face for that organization…that could have profound impacts on the success of that entity down the line.

GOALS AND STRATEGIC PLANNING

Another common theme is a need for clear goals and priorities. MRA projects, say many interviewees, do align with community goals but it's not always clear. They want to see a clear strategic plan, developed in collaboration with the community that details how MRA's goals align with community goals.

> The City and MRA are working on strategic planning so that we set priorities for goals for each district. Right now, we are not doing a good job of showing how MRA is using TIF projects to carry out City goals. Every project does that, but MRA doesn't do a good job of connecting the dots.

"Having clear goals and objectives for each district would really help with communication. If we could show how each project meets the City's goals, there might be less misinformation. For example, deconstruction was important for this project because of the City's Zero Waste Initiative which came from a desire from the community. Without TIF funds on this project, the developer would have taken materials to the landfill.

I really like the idea of having a stated goal for each district so that they know when they've met that goal. And it's not just a moving target. We can't move the goalpost if we want it. I think that would help a lot of people (detractors on City Council) and others that would like to see that end game.

The Board should play a central role in developing a strategic framework for TIF that is public. The question is should there be an overall framework or different ones for each District and the Mayor and City Council should be involved in that planning.

Butte created a priority list. Does Missoula have one? Is it public?

Objectives and metrics are also important for being more accountable to the community.

They need a dashboard. Right on the front of the website. They need to show "these are our goals and this is how we're doing in terms of meeting them." If they fund a project that doesn't meet community goals, then everyone will know it.

They need to have a specific mandate with, with guardrails in place to keep TIF pointed at that mandate.

Goals and strategic planning are especially important now, say interviewees, as Missoula faces unprecedented growth and the challenges that come with it.

GROWTH AND CHANGE

Missoula's growth seems to be at the core of the controversy around TIF. Some interviewees say we need growth. Some fear it. Some say government should get out of the way, while others say government should step in and control it.

Growth, say many interviewees, was already happening in Missoula, but it was slower and steadier. Some still see it that way.

> *I think it's important to look at the long arc here. Missoula grows at a 1.5% or 2% a year, year in, year out…I haven't looked at census data recently, but I suspect that number hasn't changed. It's the anecdotal environment and the rhetoric that changes the perception around that really manageable, steady eddy growth. There have been people from elsewhere buying houses in Missoula forever. Today they happen to be buying them very quickly and at higher prices.*

But most say that COVID was a game changer for Missoula. People are moving here from all over the country at a much faster pace.

> *Growth in Missoula is real. It started about four years ago and then exploded during COVID once people figured out the technology to work remotely. Development Services can't keep up.*

> *The wildcard to me is the ability to work remotely. That might be a permanent new dynamic.*

> *The goal has totally been to bring new people, new jobs, new investment to Missoula. That's been sort of the community call for the last 20 or 30 years. We need to be more competitive. We need higher salaries. We need more housing. Those have been goals for three decades. So, we've been working really hard on that. And what's happened right now is COVID has kind of flipped us on our heads a little bit, and people are selling their houses in major metropolitan areas and buying homes in our marketplace sight unseen with cash. And so, all of a sudden, I'm sort of scared about what's going on here. I worry a little bit like others. Is 40,000 people in the next 25 years too many people, not enough people, just the right amount? Are they going to*

come whether we do anything or not? Nationally we've migrated from rural areas to urban areas, but COVID has flipped it. And now we're going back to rural areas from urban areas. And so more people are going to move to Missoula from San Francisco or Austin or Seattle.

I always thought it was going to be a climate change incident. And to some degree it was, I mean, California, this summer was I think maybe one of the biggest climate issues that pushed people here…there's a lot of people from Oregon and people from Washington that came here. The pandemic has just been a really obvious impact.

Some interviewees see change as a potential threat to the culture of Missoula and that the MRA needs to take a leadership position in planning for the future of our community.

The whole COVID situation has made it clear what Missoula is in for. We're on the lip, if not over the edge of a major wave of in-migration. And what that means to me is that the community as a whole needs to be doing some really serious strategic thinking. From any perspective, MRA is going to be a player in whatever emerges from that kind of broader strategic undertaking. And I think that at a minimum MRA should be saying, "we know we are going to be a player in whatever comes. We're ready to be a player. Here are some of the principles that outline how we think we could most effectively play in that arena."

And having clear goals is even more crucial now for the MRA, they say.

> *When you look at all those places where people want to get away, but they don't really want to get away. They're developable. Missoula is desirable. It's probably the most liberal and it's got the most water…. So, the way we develop going forward is going to be insanely important. MRA should definitely have those goals clearly lined out.*

One interviewee framed the issue in terms of our community's capacity for "self-determination" and how what makes our community strong is being challenged.

> *What it puts at risk is the community's capacity for self-determination, which I believe is preeminently important. It's important to any community and it's a big part of what has made Missoula as strong a community as it is. We have continued to believe that we are in charge of our own destiny. That is going to be challenged in a whole*

new way. And in that context, a tool like TIF becomes much more important. When the chances are that you're not going have enough tools to maintain self-determination, then every tool becomes even more important.

New people moving here don't have the same sense of civic culture as Missoulians, they say.

> *There will be all kinds of threats. We already see the pressure on the housing prices and so on. That's going to be a core one. I worry about the civic culture itself. People who move here who have really no idea of where they are and no idea of the history of the place and no notion of how to become part of a self-governing community. That will be a factor. There's a danger as that pressure builds, that Missoula will begin to reflect more of the political polarization that is so evident everywhere else. Boy, that is a real danger to a self-determining political culture.*

To counter that issue, say some interviewees, we need to "take an active hand" in maintaining "the social and economic diversity of the community." But there are few tools that communities have for that purpose. TIF, however, "has proven to be a very good and powerful tool."

> *No City ever gets to the place where it no longer has challenges or problems, because that's just not the nature of human history. We always have new problems. In Missoula right now, for example, we clearly face a major problem of in-migration pushing up property values and threatening to make Missoula unlivable for a lot of people who have been here for a long time. And that there's a general consensus that we should do what we reasonably can to maintain the social and economic diversity of the community, but that's not going to happen by itself. We have to take an active hand as a community in doing that.*

> *There are precious few tools that, any community, and maybe especially a community in a state like Montana has, that we can put to work for objectives that we choose.*

Well, I'll tell you our growth is out of control. If it wasn't for TIF, we wouldn't have done the Master Plan and TIF and the Master Plan really looks holistically at our community and where we want to be and where our pitfalls are and how we accommodate for the future…it's going to preserve all the amenities that are unique to Missoula and going look at provisions to accommodate growth and housing and business.

Other interviewees disagree. They see growth as positive, even necessary for our community.

The notion that we have a self that is unchanging as a community, I think we should be really careful about suggesting that we have this thing here that we should just protect and, by others coming in, we lose that thing…I think there's a lot of historical evidence that culture has tried to isolate themselves and protect themselves from others and from differences. I don't think it's a very healthy way to think about what we're doing as a community to grow.

There are people that don't like to see this kind of economic development happening in our community, but folks can benefit from having a strong business community and a place to live and actually make money. Not just the service industry.

Some people, they claim, are nostalgic and still think that "the movers and shakers are making decisions over a cup of coffee and a carrot at the farmer's market." But it doesn't work that way anymore, they say, "that's just no longer our format." It's important that we welcome outsiders to Missoula, they say, instead of trying to stop them from coming. We need to embrace the changes but still plan for them in "meaningful ways."

I'll just be honest, if we don't bring people here, we will die as a community. You know, we don't produce human beings at a fast enough rate in Montana or Missoula to meet the needs of the employers who grow and want to be here, and they'll leave if we don't have people. So, we have to find a way to welcome outsiders into Missoula. I think many of us who have lived in other places also feel like by inviting new people to Missoula, we might start to develop a richness of diversity that we lack here. And that can also contribute to an incredible quality of life.

"We don't need to incentivize growth. We need to incentivize people doing the right thing in an environment where we have limited tools to do that. Growth in a popular place is inevitable. And it's not manageable. We don't have the tools to manage growth. What we can do is guide growth, and in many cases where we have active Urban Renewal Districts, we can mitigate that growth.

I see people coming from California, Seattle, Texas, but I also see them coming from Africa and we want that. We want diversity. We want new people. We've always been a community that has been wanting to attract people in arts and culture and people in technology and people who value education and the environment.

One thing that I worry about a lot is that we think a lot about competition for houses in Missoula against one another, and that sort of lack of inventory. One of the things I think about a lot is the inventory of places like Missoula on earth. There aren't very many. There aren't that many places that have the incredible quality of life, the richness of environment, the educated workforce. So, we are going to be a desirable place that people are going to want to come to. If we sort of somehow try to ignore that, or fight that, or not plan for that in a meaningful way, then I think that we will ultimately fail because we can't stop people from coming. So, I think maybe redefine self-determination to realize that we are evolving and changing, and that maybe that's an okay thing. And we work toward that and plan for that in meaningful ways.

The way we go about doing this is about improving the lives of the people who are here first and foremost. And some of that includes recognizing that to improve the people's lives, who are here, more people will and need to come. It's just an inevitability and how we address that is as part of the bigger picture.

I think it's about managing change to deliver the community we want to see in the future. I think growth is inevitable. Economic development is inevitable. More people coming here as developers is

inevitable, but sort of whether or not we actually address some of the fundamental challenges that exist here as a result of not changing our behavior, or we try to address them by incentivizing small changes here and there. That could determine whether we get the community we want in ten years or not. And I think that's what we're all trying to do through TIF, through economic development, through incentivized work.

Still others say that growth and change are inevitable, and that we just need to get used to Missoula being different.

> *The culture is going to change. And I don't think there's anything you can do about it. You can't put a fence up and keep people out. I absolutely wouldn't advocate for that. I think that it's just going to be a given that traffic is going to be worse. You can't build enough roads or get enough people on bikes to make that difference. Traffic is going to be worse. And what you can do as an individual is don't drive on Reserve Street. The culture, I think, is a function of numbers. At some point, if you want the atmosphere you had in Missoula in 1980, move to Hamilton. That's what the people I talk to in Seattle who lived in Seattle in 1980 say about Seattle. Today they are moving to Missoula.*

> *The fact of the matter is it's [growth] going to happen. And us being able to manage it and do it responsibly is going to be critical. I just don't think we can stop it. So just making sure that we're responsible about everything, from how we manage our water to the streets, parking, and everything associated with that.*

But all interviewees agree that growth is putting tremendous pressure on Missoula's housing market.

> *We've turned a page in Montana. I don't think we're going back…Missoula and Bozeman are by far the hottest markets, but absolutely in the Flathead Valley and Helena, yes. It's even happening in places like Billings…there's just no housing stock out there. Where are we going from here? When we put together the City housing policy two years ago, I think we had a much different economic reality than we do now.*

It seems like the wave of the housing crisis has got to break some time, but it just keeps getting bigger, and the problems and community effect on neighbors that we're dealing with now, or it's just the stuff falling off the front of the wave. And we really haven't even seen the full scope of that problem yet…my folks have recently retired in Missoula…I thought I was welcoming them to a community that would be a productive and satisfying and welcoming place for them to retire. And it turns out that that work gets harder and harder all the time to make sure that that's true.

Thank God we have that housing policy in place. And thank God we have a City Council that's willing to do some things because we have got to be proactive…it makes my stomach turn over a little bit because it's like, people just say, "well, we just need to build more housing." Well, okay. For who? At this point, after living through what we've gone through with COVID, how do we guarantee that people who live in this community actually have a fighting chance? It's really hard living in this market, in the capitalist system that we live in. I mean, we started to talk about limiting sales to people that live somewhere else. Basically, the only places that do that are resort towns, and you have to have state legislation to do that. I feel like we have a turnover in the people that are living here in some ways, because we're at a point where there's certain people that can live here and some people can't. The ones that were here. We all got lucky.

Some say the pressure is not coming from newcomers but, even so, Missoula is in crisis.

So, we have a housing crisis and it's about inventory. It's really not about fussy foreigners coming in with their bags of cash and snatching up real estate. It's about everybody wanting real estate, including the thousands and thousands of Missoulians who were interested in buying a house today and the inventory doesn't exist, and that doesn't exist for a variety of reasons. A big recession does that, a pandemic doesn't help, historically low interest rates, pre-pandemic full employment, basically, all of that. And by the way, it's a pretty okay place to live. So, all of that is a contributing factor here. I simply don't buy this notion.

This pressure, which has led to growing challenges with housing costs and availability, evictions from sudden and impossible rent increases, increased property taxes, and growing wealth inequality is at the heart of most interviewees' perception of TIF. On one extreme are those who see MRA's use of TIF as a cause for many of these problems. On the other, are those who see TIF as the solution. Most interviewees fall somewhere in between.

DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSING

Many detractors from TIF of different political persuasions say that in a community where people are struggling to pay rent, they are angry that money is going to "subsidize" corporations. Starbucks, Stockman's Bank and the mall are referred to over and over again as major TIF recipients.

> *The City has not necessarily done a great job when it helps Starbucks in developing its landscaping on Brooks Street with TIF money. I think that was a decision that was an error. And I think that got the hackles of the community up. Why are we helping a multinational corporation put in landscaping? They should darn well do it themselves.*

> *The word was, well, Stockman Bank was coming to Missoula and they were going to build that building. That's the same building they build everywhere and that was going to happen regardless of whether there was TIF money invested or not. And I think that's probably true, but by the same token, I understand that I don't know how you would set criteria that would determine that a project wasn't going to happen without TIF money.*

Even some interviewees that see TIF as a potential budget tool that could do good for the community are frustrated by what they see as a limited access to the MRA and TIF.

I describe Tax Increment Financing as a tool that is predominantly available to those that know how to use it and know how to use the system and is underutilized by folks that need it most. And the effects of Tax Increment Financing are privileged in their distribution and not truly reflective of the community's needs.

There's a perception from community members that if you have access to TIF funding, you've either been thrown a bone as a non-profit developer or you are part of the in crowd and you have access to power. You golf at the right golf club, you eat dinner at the right dinner club. You've talked to the right people. Maybe you go to the right church or whatever, those pathways to power are, there is a real and genuine sense. And, the perception is that in order to have access to TIF, you need to dress the right way and have the right business card and have handed it to the right people in the last 10 years. You know 53% of us are renters. And 40% of those are housing insecure. Not a lot of people feel like they're in that club.

What about small businesses that contribute to neighborhoods, they ask. There is a perception that MRA funding with TIF only goes to big projects that create a substantial growth of the tax base.

How do small business owners and people in the community understand and find the MRA process accessible?... How do small businesses view the MRA? Do they see that it's possible for them to ask for this kind of funding and build something in a neighborhood that doesn't have a lot other amenities that the community wants? In Franklin to the Fort, we hear a lot that people want a neighborhood corner store. We are between Reserve and Third street, where you have the Good Food Store, which is pretty expensive, and you also have to cross Third. You'd have to cross Reserve or major streets to get to major grocery stores. But in the heart of Franklin to the Fort, a lot of people want corner markets. If you were in the position where you owned a property and you could turn it into a corner market, do you see the MRA as an accessible body or TIF as an accessible pool of funds that could help you develop that for and in your community?

If I am somehow magically able to buy or rehabilitate an existing property to make it a corner market for my neighborhood and I want to ask for TIF funding to help me deconstruct or construct that or increase the sidewalk, is that going to be weighed evenly with a massive development project down by the river? And who gets to decide that? Are the five people on the MRA board like "Oh yeah, but Franklin to the Fort, it's not going to increase property taxes that much. Is it that important to the community?" Who gets to decide that and attribute the value? I suspect it doesn't stack up well if we're looking at pure financial metrics. It might not stack up well...but it might be actually be community driven and important to the community.

And, they say, where is the regulation that keeps TIF investments safe in the long-term? They point to projects where the MRA has invested and the property owner benefited then flipped the property. This, they say, leads to the perception of TIF as a "gentrification machine" that is ultimately pricing people out of their neighborhoods.

> *How can we advocate that TIF is used for affordable housing, but it has to be affordable housing that stays affordable. It can't be, "let's build it as affordable housing and that owner sits on, flips it for many, many times more than what people can afford and they're benefiting off of that profit." The Southgate mall example...we just put in, I don't know, $700,000 as a City and they took it to improve the mall and sold it for many, many, many millions of dollars and someone else profited from that money. That is not what we want...that raises a question for me about TIF in general. How are we preventing that from happening? How are we preventing the gentrification machine from just pricing out people from their own neighborhoods?*

These perceptions are frustrating for interviewees who see the MRA's use of TIF as a crucial tool to address growth, preserve our culture, and address inequality.

> *Provided it remains the tool that it is based on our strategic planning, TIF will have a significant role in creating housing opportunities for all Missoulians. TIF will have a significant role in infrastructure, basic infrastructure, water, sewer, sidewalk, other transportation. TIF will have a role in parks and recreation and open spaces. TIF will have a role in removing blight. TIF will have a role in planning. TIF will have a role in design. It touches a lot of stuff.*

> *There's a lack of understanding about how [using TIF] is one of the ways that you can build a strong tax base and build jobs and build housing and build community services. Sometimes people don't see, for example, the Merc as an asset. They don't understand the value of having that investment—of having, eleven businesses in the building, the jobs, the tech space, the property value...the entire property value of downtown was X amount before TIF was created*

today, it's Z amount. The purpose of doing things like this is to help improve property values, reduce blight, reduce crime, improve safety, increase quality of life, and increase amenities.

The MRA makes strategic investments that ensure there's housing for the workforce, who works here to also live here and for the people who are living here now to go from rentals to ownership. That's all part of what I think MRA is trying to be a really strategic part of and needs to be a part of.

They point out that money actually can't go directly to developers or businesses.

> *There's a lot of criticism in Missoula because it looks like MRA is just giving City taxpayer dollars to Starbucks, and that's the narrative, right? Or they're giving tax dollars to the wealthy Bozeman developer. They don't understand that it can't go directly to developers. It can only be used for specific items within that project. They don't understand that TIF can leverage a better project, a better design, a higher density development.*

> *So that's the cool thing about MRA and the TIF assistance, it can only go to purposes that ultimately benefit the public…so public sidewalks, public streets, public utilities in the event of the deconstruction. I believe that's one the things that they can do with TIF because ultimately it reduces blight. So, there's the public infrastructure. And then there's deconstruction activities too.*

Many interviewees say that this perception of TIF is based on misunderstandings caused by a lack of messaging.

> *One area that I think they've probably struggled a little bit is the messaging piece. People feel like it's corporate welfare or a handout for developers or a handout for the rich. Nothing could be more false. If we look at the overall benefit that comes to a community, it's an investment.*

We've really had to be intentional about how we talk about our work…I think that MRA can benefit from such a thing as well, because so much of this comes from a lack of understanding from people. It's easy to be suspicious of a bridge over Reserve Street when you have no idea how it was financed and how it was planned. The distrust that comes from lack of understanding is dangerous in so many parts of our society. I mean, it's everywhere, but it's clearly plaguing the MRA.

Missoula has as a focus, an intense focus on affordable housing. And, just because they're not coming up with the silver bullet solution that just solves the affordable housing problem, they are doing some really, really good things. And TIF is part of that story. And that's part of the story we've got to tell.

And some skeptics agree that MRA needs to be better, and more honest, about communication. They want more transparent communication that forces MRA to "acknowledge where the money goes."

I hope that it's possible to tell the whole truth about what MRA does in a very transparent way. You can stamp a sidewalk or you can say this public park is courtesy of the MRA, or whatever. But are you able to use that same level of transparency on all the projects? Would it still paint the picture of MRA that they imagine themselves to be if all projects were openly talked about simplistically…if what they're saying is true, which is that we're not giving away to developers, we're building a road here, then they should be okay with it, right?

In fact, transparency is the number one request from many skeptical interviewees. They say that it's hard to trust the MRA when even basic information is not available for the public.

There's obviously a problem with transparency. It's really hard to find even things as simple as what the budget is. And we've heard that they're allocating a million dollars a year to the affordable housing trust fund, but what percentage of their overall budget is that? It's unclear how to find just those very basic numbers.

"I don't know what they can do in terms of public engagement. There's a fundamental issue because I, like many community members, don't understand how TIF works fully because it's not transparent or communicated well. What are they allowed to do with public money, and where are the opportunities for MRA to do the most for everyday people that they can?"

One question, ask some interviewees, is what ratio of MRA's budget is going to housing and other community projects? That information is nowhere to be found, they say. If it were, and if it shows that the MRA is doing the good work, that would go a long way to building community trust.

It's unclear to me the ratio of MRA's projects that benefit everyday people in relation to projects that raise the tax base. I would like to see more transparency on what percentage of MRA's projects are dedicated to helping develop affordable housing given that we are in a housing crisis and it seems like an opportunity to use public funds to develop more permanently affordable housing. How long do they have to "prime the pump" before the community sees benefits for everyday people? I worry the MRA runs the risk of becoming a gentrification machine on its pursuit to increase the tax base. Alternatively, at what point does the surrounding neighborhood get to benefit by seeing things that they can afford to go to, rather than a bunch of restaurants that appeal to tourists, for example? And I realize that maybe that's just also a communication problem or a transparency problem. Maybe those community good projects are happening, but we're just not seeing them because people are writing op-eds only about projects like the Merc.

In addition to actual harder data that is easy to interpret, what is the budget? What is it allocated towards? They have different…it looks like categories…in terms of deconstruction and sidewalk and things like that. But how we come to this conversation is affordable housing. What is the MRA or TIF contributing in terms of needs in the community? And, specifically, what percentage of that is affordable housing or contributes to affordable housing? I think those are some of the things we are looking for and we have not been able to find.

Meanwhile, developers, bankers and others involved with the development process say that public perception about them is incorrect. They say that a lack of affordable land for development, a nationwide shortage of building materials, and steep impact fees in Missoula are making development more challenging.

Developer's margins are slim. It is hard to make things pencil in Missoula right now.

Missoula is not a great place to develop as a sole investor. If you're a member of the community, I think it's a great place to invest in and develop. But, if I was just a developer and all I was doing is looking for the greatest ROI, I wouldn't touch Missoula.

If you talk to any developer, they will tell you that Missoula, Montana is one of the worst places to develop now more than ever. They'll develop in Oregon. They'll develop in Idaho, but they won't do any development here because just so dang hard.

And they point out, most developers are not big money people from out-of-state. They are local contractors that are taking big risks and not making huge profits.

They're homegrown contractors that started 30 some years ago, there's certainly some younger ones that have come into the market and they're starting to make a name for themselves but, again, they are smaller contractors that realize that if they can get in four or five lots to get started. And then the next time they do a 10-lot division and subdivision.

The local developers aren't big money developers. It's hard for their projects to pencil out. They're getting at most a 15% margin. That's their goal. But you add increases in costs right now and impact fees and everything piles up. Plus, you don't make money until the end of a project.

There's a perception that developers make this vast amount of money. And while I think developers do make money, I won't minimize that. They also take a tremendous amount of risk and sometimes if it's the wrong part of an economic cycle and they get caught in a period where they can't sell what they've built or it's a longer hold period, they might've made a lot of money three years ago, but this year they might be losing this much on the backend.

In addition to shortages of materials and price increases, interviewees claim that there have been issues with the City planning department that is making development more inefficient and, thus, more costly.

What we have seen is that the City has driven up the costs markedly. Part of that is because of inconsistency within planning. Part of it is because of the time it takes to get anything through planning. Between general arbitrariness and time commitment, both regular citizens and the City are probably unaware of how much it's costing developers to take on that level of uncertainty. And then also to bear the carrying cost of delays in construction, because of just ridiculous notions that the City has, that it doesn't apply uniformly across the board. So, if we're looking at affordable housing, one of the most important things to do is to really work with the planning and permitting departments to the City, to make sure that things are expeditious as possible, as opposed to an obstacle and recognizing that those carrying costs get passed right on to affordable housing.

We have a building cycle where we can't build from November until spring. So, if infrastructure is not able to get in the ground before it freezes, and that's often because of time delay from the City, then the infrastructure can't get in the ground. That's another five months of holding costs. And if you think about the average bank rate for developers who don't get the 3% homeowner rate from banks, they're paying 7, 10, 12, 15% to basically hold for another six months because they weren't able to get their infrastructure in the ground. And they weren't able to then immediately roll in the spring so that they're lucky to get started again by fall. It's just this kind of cascading event of small little things that just continually occur.

The Mayor and Development Services and the MRA need to be open and actually listen to the developers too. They aren't just complaining about impact fees. It's critical that this gets figured out or we're going to be the next Bozeman or Yellowstone Club where only the wealthy can afford to buy anything here.

Those expenses, say interviewees, get passed directly on to buyers and tenants, which just adds to the problem.

Any costs you add to a bigger development is going to be added to the cost. The developer's not going to absorb all that…so it's going to get passed on and our lots are going to get more expensive and our housing is going to be more expensive.

Therefore, TIF is important to make development happen in Missoula, they say.

This project could not and would not have happened unless we had assistance through TIF. If MRA had not stepped in to pay for the deconstruction of this massive concrete building, we simply could not have made the numbers work that would have resulted in the development that you see out here right now. But people look at that after the fact, and they say, "Oh, well, you could have made that work." And it's like we don't have crystal balls as developers. We cannot look into the future to see the success of our projects.

You do have to be relatively sophisticated and have some wherewithal to do these projects but the developers probably wouldn't do them if they didn't have a little assistance or incentive to do them…like burying power lines etc.

And, especially, to make development happen in areas that need it most.

When developers come to town and they're looking for a place to develop they're looking for something that's going to give them the best opportunity to be successful in their business. That does not usually translate to working in or developing in areas that are blighted that are low income that are you know, crime-ridden…and some people choose not to develop their businesses there.

The real question is where is the development going to take place, right? Development is going to happen, but is it going to happen in the areas that the City really wants it and needs it to happen? That's where TIF comes in. It becomes that incentive, that tool to steer people away from North Reserve and steer them to West Broadway… so yes, development is going to happen. And with TIF, you can help influence where that development takes place.

TIF is more like a loan, says one interviewee.

And so, Tax Increment Financing is a way to use developer dollars to invest in those areas. It creates an incentive program for them to invest in those areas through essentially tax credits, but the credits come through a unique way, but ultimately, the TIF district bonds and they offer the money up front and then the developer pays that back with, with their increased property taxes.

In fact, the way the process works, the developer pays for everything until the project is over and they prove that the work was done. Then they get reimbursed.

We have to put up the money up front. We have to finance it with the understanding that they're going to reimburse it later. So the risk is huge.

We have to have a finished product that we deliver. We have to have a certificate of occupancy and everything before they will even reimburse it, before they'll even think of reimbursing us. There is no risk on the part of the public.

What TIF does, they say, is take just enough risk out of their projects to make them viable.

The notion that developers are getting handouts from the MRA is also unfair, say some interviewees. They don't make extra money from MRA projects. In fact, says one interviewee, developers in Missoula are usually local people who are, "yes, trying to make a profit like any businessperson," but also, who are taking a greater risk because they love Missoula and want to provide jobs, housing, and a strong economy.

We're constrained…we have just not got a lot of land to develop so the developments, they're going to be smaller scale. Generally, they're not going to provide the type of risk/reward relationship that developers are really after if that's their sole purpose. But, we're developers that are also contributing members of the community. A lot of our developers here are. We developed this property for the purpose of growing our business, not for the purpose of just turning a profit.

Some interviewees say we should look at developers differently. They are providing a big service to our community just as other business owners provide services that we need to grow and thrive.

Well, do you like what the Wilma looks like? Okay. Yeah. The thing that's crucial to me is at some point, [a developer] signed a big note even though he got some MRA help and let's just say he got $200,000 in MRA dollars, well, he's probably signed a bank loan for $1,500,000 and he put his name on that note. And if he didn't pay it back, they were going to foreclose. And so, I have a lot of respect for the people that are willing to do that. They create things like the Wilma.

One of the biggest benefits that development offers is jobs. We have grown. Five years ago we were a 30-person company, and we're now over a hundred people with a majority of those people being right here in Missoula, our headquarters being here. So, every person that we bring to Missoula comes here, works here, buys a home here, purchases services here, buys groceries and pays taxes here, all of it. It's a benefit to the community. And they're high paying jobs too. These aren't minimum wage positions where we're looking to cycle people in and out. These are people that are going to come here. They're

going to stay here. They're going to raise a family here. They're going to be contributing members of the community in a way that provides a tremendous amount of value.

Still other interviewees say that the MRA and the City go too far in trying to help developers. They don't buy the idea that it is difficult to develop in Missoula or that the only way to get public improvement on projects is through TIF.

> *This song that developers sing that is like, it is so hard to make money being a developer. You know, those are threats. Those are threats from developers. That is a veiled threat. When a developer says, 'well, you already have too many regulations.''They're saying that in every community that they move into to develop because they want to have less regulations in every community. If there's almost no regulations, they're going to rail against those small little picky regulations that already exist. The intangibles of our community are too valuable for us to just give away to developers that say, "well, you're really making it risky up there." Well, then don't develop here. That's my response to that. We don't owe you the opportunity to develop here as a community.*
>
> *And if you want to have nice things like parks and sidewalks, then you need to capitulate to large development dollars is, I think, it's a false dichotomy. I think it plays into the narrative of false scarcity where there's not enough to go around and we need the benevolence of developing capital to spread the jam to our edge of the toast so to speak. And that's, I think that's more mythology than that's capitalist mythology as opposed to actual practice in my, in my opinion.*
>
> *The City can mandate whatever they want in terms of building code. They can mandate nice sidewalks and nice streetlights from new development too. They can say that if you're going to build a profit bearing property then it needs to have this. They can change the zoning rules to do that.*

They say that the City should "hold the bar higher" for developers and "pursue the right kind of development."

Maybe we shouldn't just be saying yes to the first developer that comes along. Maybe we should hold the bar a little higher and wait for the second or third that has the gumption and the wherewithal and the vision to do projects that really benefit the town instead of pretending that in a market that's guaranteeing, 18% or 22% or whatever that is, that's a guaranteed payday for any developer on any project, no matter what.

Let's look for projects that we like and engage those developers directly as opposed to waiting for them to come to us—court developers of projects that have shown community betterment, that have wage guarantees associated with them, supporting projects like community centers or shared space or community ownership models, for development.

If you think that there's a less risky community to developing by all means go to that community and develop, unless you are going to develop a facility or a piece of infrastructure that is guaranteeing a living wage, which at this point is not 15 bucks in Missoula. It's not 28 bucks in Missoula anymore. Like you could be making $60,000 a year or something like that. You could be making that money and still qualify at 110% of the median income or whatever, for affordable housing. So, if developers can't guarantee that, they should get on to some other community.

Others say the City should just get out of the way. Government just shouldn't be involved in development.

We need to just let development happen on its own. There is no place for the government in this process. We don't need to be spending our taxpayer money to incentivize development that is just going to happen anyway.

It just goes back to conservative folks, fiscally mostly, thinking "I'm paying more taxes because of TIF." And that is true. I mean, if you took the TIF money and put it towards the County and the City and the School District, arguably their taxes would be lower and they think taxes are too high. They think the government's inefficient and there are a lot of people that feel that way and at some level. I agree and I certainly think that private business can do things more efficiently than the government.

And many interviewees say that there really is no need for TIF anymore:

> I don't blame anybody for taking the money if somebody wants to give it to you, you should be smart enough to take it. There's lots of situations where the project is going to happen, regardless of whether there's Tax Increment Financing involved or not. It's just not needed anymore.

Meanwhile, some interviewees believe the City should actually be more involved. They should get rid of public/private partnerships and own housing themselves.

> The City has some sort of unwritten mandate to never be a landlord themselves. And so, they have to put these projects out into the public/private partnership arena, where I think that it's okay to just have straight up public-owned housing.

Others strongly disagree that the City should own housing, but they do suggest that the City do more work with partner organizations.

> If we're going to be talking about the things that the City has expertise in, I don't think they have expertise in building running and maintaining, housing projects. Nor do I think as a taxpayer that they should. I don't think the City's got the level of expertise, the level of, capacity to begin those kinds of projects. And we have organizations that are already doing it in our community.

The MRA is already working with non-profit and other partners on the housing issue. TIF, say interviewees, is expanding public infrastructure and helping community developers create housing that is not only affordable but beautiful for tenants and with access to outdoor spaces.

> TIF has expanded public infrastructure. MRA can help us maybe with street lighting or sidewalks, then we can take that money and we can do something else on the property. We're constantly dealing with the need to consider budget cuts. We always want to do more on a project than we can afford. And so, when MRA dollars can assist us with those community benefits, then we can do more for the project.

It's really critical that, first and foremost, the people that live there deserve to live in a beautiful place. They deserve the dignity of living in a beautiful space. And then ultimately it needs to be an amenity, not only for the person living there, but for the neighborhood and the community. And clearly it will help reduce NIMBYism. If folks can see that there's a building that they can identify living in because it's got nice aesthetics, then they will be more accepting of the fact that it is "affordable housing."

A lot of it comes down to cost. And if a developer is trying to maximize their profit, they're not going to spend extra money on design that is pleasing to the eye, to the public. They don't have to.

According to other interviewees, TIF allows the City to bring things to community projects that could never happen with private developers. This is especially true with land banking and the cleanup of industrial spaces.

Land banking is something the City can use TIF for to make sure affordable housing projects can happen.

Land costs are a significant part and because TIF can help contribute to affordable housing with land cost, it's a big deal. For a developer, when finding land is one of the biggest issues and challenges that we have, land banking is basically holding onto land while waiting for it to be developed. Technically, I suppose we could go buy a piece of property and land bank something, but it has a mortgage on it. So, it's basically buying a piece of land and sticking it in the bank, waiting

for it to be developed. A municipality or a redevelopment agency may have resources that it can pay cash for something. It's a really critical tool.

As a developer land is hard to come by. It's expensive. So, if there is a tool that can be facilitated through TIF to reduce those costs, whether the MRA is holding the land, or there is cleanup associated, or if I've got to hold land for a year while I put the development package together, but I know that I've got $200,000 or $300,000 in sidewalk and lighting, that's going to reduce the cost of my development, then that is one thing that helps actually make a deal. Work costs are going up at exponential rates right now because we're in a feeding frenzy. Labor is almost impossible to get so it's at a premium construction. Labor and materials are really expensive. So, it can really help.

The City can do things like take land that is only approved for industrial use and use TIF funds and other funding to clean up. So, projects can happen that could never happen with only private developers.

We have a lot of urban areas that were once industrial areas. And we still do in that Reserve Street corridor. TIF allows you to be able to repurpose that and harness other resources like EPA cleanup dollars and stuff like that.

And, they say, TIF allows the City and other groups to leverage grant funding that they otherwise couldn't get.

There are millions of dollars of grant funding available. I've seen the MRA leverage those like we did the Brooks street corridor study. They helped seed a little bit of that effort and we were able to do our corridor study. And now there's a TOD [Transit Oriented Development] study. And then Midtown is kind of coming, clicking on heels. There's going to be a Midtown master plan and that's going to tee us up for a much larger grant.

It [TIF] just builds layers and layers and layers. Without the support of TIF funding and the TIF districts and their opportunity to help us build these layers, it [grant funding] wouldn't happen. If you did the accounting and really looked at all the money that's brought into the community, leveraged through just the precise investment of those funds, it's just a huge benefit. People don't even realize. So as standalone the TIF programs are great. And then when you look at how some of these communities leverage their funds, it makes it even more of an amazing program.

Interviewees also point to the fact that the MRA is able to use TIF to attract business in a planned way that is more connected and better for the community.

I think it's good to attract businesses here and they're going to come whether we have a TIF program or not, but maybe the pattern of development is not going to be as comprehensive where the TIF district looks at blight and streets and trails and connections and parks.

That's great, say some interviewees, but there is still a very real housing crisis. They want the City to revisit inclusionary zoning, which the state legislature just banned in Montana.

There needs to be a mandated percentage of affordable housing units created by TIF. So, for every hotel room that was created, there would have to be a certain number of actual perpetually affordable bedrooms that were created.

The MRA did such a good job in the past few years, says one interviewee that, without meaning to, it added to the housing crisis. So, they have a real responsibility to help address it. But, they say, TIF is only one piece of addressing the housing crisis puzzle.

The MRA is not the sole brand of the affordable housing crisis, which a lot of people look at because their money is public money…there's a lot of things that can be done to fix affordable housing that aren't being done in Missoula and TIF dedication is one of them.

But it's also going to take a lot more than that and it's not just on the MRA. I was guilty of thinking that the TIF set aside was potentially all we need… a silver bullet. And it's not. As California showed, only if it works with other programs.

The City and MRA need to be looking at lots of options, they say, both at the state and local level.

TIF dedication, inclusionary zoning, developer incentives and state LIHTC (Low-Income Housing Tax Credit) matching programs. Those are all things that other states do that have handled affordable housing and a lot of those things aren't being really utilized in Montana, but some of them have been banned by the governor.

TDRs [Transfer Development Rights] and PDRs [Purchase of Development Rights]. And the pressure should be on the state to get the LIHTC [Low-Income Housing Tax Credit] matches going for sure. As far as the city goes, we just make the incentives for developers, just godfather-like offers that they can't refuse. Like "we'll give you 40% for area ratio increase for 20% affordable housing." Something like that would really incentivize people and get them motivated and have them be able to take those incentives and apply for funding in the affordable housing trust fund to then be able to continue to fund the affordable housing aspect of their projects—kind of have that going in a circle as well—and have the TIF set aside to get them there as well.

Some interviewees also want the City and MRA to work harder to address income inequality. They say TIF dollars should only go to projects that pay a living wage.

I would forbid Tax Increment Financing from being used on projects that were not going to perpetually pay a living wage. If we have a project that is going to use Tax Increment Financing, say it was a hotel that was going to use Tax Increment Financing, and there was even a possibility that somebody that worked on the housekeeping crew of that hotel, a building full of bedrooms, would be housing insecure as the result of their being underpaid. That is criminal use of tax money, in my view. So, every employee, from the people that build the project to the end line barista that is working in the lobby of the project, needs to be paid a living wage, and that needs to be guaranteed.

> *We need to democratize decision making in our community and, in terms of TIF, really using it as a way to winnow out projects that are truly in the benefit of the community. They might look good in the architectural renderings, but there's that wage slave working in the basement or working in the housekeeping department or working at the front desk, that's not going to be able to afford a home in Missoula. That's a net detriment to our community.*

Then there is the issue of taxes. Critics say that TIF "starves our general fund." They say that the money being diverted from the general fund is needed for all the new growth that TIF is supporting and that "taxpayers in other districts are paying for the surge in service demand."

> *They have a corner on a very large tax base and the time period that they control the taxes for, the increase in taxes is now tied up for 40 years. It's too long to build a slush fund that they don't have to run by the voters or the taxpayers to figure out what to do with that money. It's way too long to tie up future tax increases and taxes on property.*

Most interviewees say that TIF does not directly raise taxes, it raises property values, which, many say, is a good thing.

> *It doesn't raise your taxes. It raises your property value, which is a good thing. As a result of your property value, the taxes goes up. If your value isn't going up, it means your building is depreciating because it is blighted, and it's headed in the wrong direction.*

> *Property values increase because your neighborhood is much better…it's much more desirable for people to come and recreate and do business in your community. To me, that's a good thing. I*

think it's a misconception to say it's statically raising your taxes with no benefit.

And, some say, the property values are going to go up anyway.

> *I don't see the correlation where the improvements and the benefits of the re-investing in the TIF district to keep your community healthy, would negatively increase the value of your property, and raise your taxes. And when you talk about incremental taxes, it's a misconception that we're incrementally increasing your taxes. It's going to occur no matter if the MRA is there or not.*
>
> *You know, you could look a little outside of a TIF District, and you're going to see the same trajectory and taxes that you see within the TIF District.*

But some say the benefits of rising property values are not good for everyone.

> *I always thought we need to grow, and the value of our houses will go up and that's good for everybody…then I talked to an older guy. He lived into his nineties…worked at the mill, raised his kids…the typical Missoulian of that era and his house was worth $10,000 when he bought it. And when he died, it was worth $500,000. And you'd say, well, that's a good thing. He'd be happy about that. "Well," he said, "now when I go up to drive onto Russell Street, I can't get on and now my taxes are so high." His kids all did well. So, they didn't need it…so that full appreciation of his house was irrelevant to him. What was relevant to him was his taxes were higher and traffic was worse.*

And yet, says one interviewee, it's not TIF investment that is hurting people with fixed incomes. It's the fact that Missoula is a "great place to live."

We need to be especially sensitive to those who have fixed incomes, right? Because, in theory, if you're working and your property values are going up, then your wages hopefully will keep pace with that growth in value. We've seen some extraordinary growth in Missoula over the past year that's been very, very concerning in that regard. So, wages are not keeping up with the value of our homes, but that's not being driven by TIF investment. That's being driven by Missoula, just being a great place to live. And there are a lot of extra forces that are causing that. I've never seen a situation where TIF is the problem as it relates to property values, getting out of control.

But many say that to argue on technicalities is counterproductive. TIF does "marginally" lead to an increase in taxes and MRA should say so. But the benefits are exponential, they say, and the MRA should do a better job of pointing those out.

MRA should acknowledge that, at least technically, it's true that if TIF didn't exist, people's property taxes might be marginally reduced but then show the benefits that TIF brings.

From the Missoulian, quoting Mayor John Engen:

And back to that notion of tax base. This is a tool we use to redevelop and enhance the community, and I believe it comes at a reasonable cost to the tax base and other taxing jurisdictions who also take advantage and benefit from that investment over the long term. I would hate to see that tool go away. It's worked very well here.

We have to acknowledge that, at least technically, it's true that if TIF didn't exist and everything else being equal, then people's property taxes probably could be reduced marginally. So, then we simply have to ask what then are the benefits of continuing to use this mechanism?

Mayor Engen says that without the growth from TIF, he would have to look for other ways to fund City services and that the City could not build the same infrastructure with the existing tax base.

My argument is that the investment that we make through our redevelopment agency is a tremendous benefit to the overall tax base. Without that growth in tax base, it simply means that I would be taxing residents and businesses more, or I would be at a cap and I would be cutting services.

What TIF dollars do is they augment everything that we're already doing through tax dollars to the public good, the infrastructure that TIF builds, I could not build with the existing tax base. So that's work that simply would be deferred another 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years, depending on how you look at it. There is certainly opportunity cost here.

Many interviewees agree with the Mayor. They see crucial City infrastructure being built that they say would not and will not happen without MRA's use of TIF.

We could drive around for three days and show you all the facilities that we put in that benefit the connectivity. There has been a lot of benefit for the road grid system and the pedestrian system and the parks.

In Midtown there are subdivisions that were built without curbs, sidewalks, gutters, etc. High density areas with no amenities. TIF has been addressing that infrastructure need.

I see a lot of community goals getting accomplished because we have TIF as a tool. And I also see a know a lot of communities that don't have TIF as a tool and really have a hard time getting things done.

And many talk about MRA's use of TIF as an "investment" in Missoula's future.

I try to simplify this for folks, trying to use sort of a personal finance model, right. TIF is sort of a large home equity loan. You don't have the money today, but a bank trusts you to use resources to improve your circumstances. And not only do they get paid back, they get paid back with interest. And their collateral gets improved as well. So, in the end, this is a low-risk, high-return investment in the future.

It's more of an investment to build up the tax base so that when you turn this District back over, the investment yields exponentially the value than if you hadn't had the opportunity to do that.

I understand the argument that the tax dollars should stay with the school districts. They should stay with the City and the County and that it's not appropriate to take that money away from those entities. It just raises everybody's taxes. I just don't agree. I think that we get a good return on our investment. It raises the base and creates more taxes in the long run, creates more tax revenue and in the interim and improves the Districts ,so I buy into the concept.

Still others go back to who is making decisions about funding. There is no consistency in projects, they say, and a small group of people is controlling taxpayer money without enough community oversight.

I do think maybe some of the issue is that people think a small group of people gets to decide where the money goes and maybe that's offensive on some of the projects that are selected.

I think the City has really got some black eyes here. I mean, whether it be on what they've funded and…basically some of the stuff doesn't meet the need or the goal of…for what it was created. I think the City has really got some black eyes here. I mean, whether it be on what they've funded and…basically some of the stuff doesn't meet the need or the goal of…for what it was created.

I think there's too many dollars going in the wrong direction and controlled by too few people.

Some supporters of the MRA's use of TIF are not in agreement with the Mayor and the City Council using TIF funds to balance the budget.

We need to establish stronger guidelines or guideposts to the whole idea of using increments as a budget balancer. I would be in favor of establishing a strong position of resistance to that. There's no way to stop the Mayor and Council from doing it if they choose, but I think it would be helpful to have established a principle that says there's a presumption against doing that. And, of course, I think that goes hand in hand with establishing a strategic framework that says these are the things that we're going to focus on and balancing the City's budget is not on this list.

Many critics are also frustrated by the extension of Urban Renewal Districts.

I think taxes are being sucked out of the general fund for too long a period of time. South Crossing is a perfect example of that. This thing got kicked out, I think till 2040. And the average taxpayer will see some benefit on that, but as taxes continue to rise, maybe some of that money should be put back in the general fund to lower taxes of all for everybody, no special projects. I mean, I could see it for 10 years or maybe 15 years, but for 25 or 30 years, too long for me.

There are large dollars in play here and controlled by very few people and the length of time. And in these Districts, it's way too long...the length of time that these properties, the tax revenue isn't put back into general fund is too long.

When you extend the time frame out to 2040, well, I'm never going to see it.

Another criticism is that when a property tax base is frozen because of TIF, they say, it forces taxpayers in other Districts to support the rise in the costs of City services. Many interviewees don't understand how development, which causes a need for more services, is funded.

> *I have gray areas of understanding about a project that gets TIF funding, how that's going to bring more residential units into an area how they can avoid supporting the revenue stream that would support the increase in the fire department that was needed to support that increase in dwelling units and that type of thing. I'd have almost zero understanding of how what the work around is there, how things happen there. I don't know so education on that topic would be good.*

In fact, supporters and detractors alike said they want more communication from MRA.

> *I think there needs to be a broad, ongoing narrative about the value of TIF—Downtown Missoula would not be the place that it is today without TIF. The entirety of Midtown would look like 1970 without TIF. We would not have the riverfront trail system without TIF, and that's not captured anywhere.*
>
> *If you were to ask me what MRA does and who's involved, and those types of things, I probably wouldn't have a very good answer. It's about getting more in front of people in shorter snips…*
>
> *I would make the public reporting process for TIF administration crystal clear to the point of where the MRA would commandeer the MCAT public access television and make a mini documentary about every project that TIF financing is going to be touching.*

Interviewees say that a lot of damage has been done by misinformation and there needs to be real, honest, and active communication to turn things around.

> *I definitely appreciate what seems like the willingness of MRA to handle what seems an impending image problem for them, but there's a lot of damage done. They've got a lot of stuff to overcome in terms of whether it's repairing and restructuring misconception or whether it's changing the course of TIF so that it can be utilized.*

What we found out on that is, is it's much easier being on the offense and getting the information out there than it is, defending everything, being on our heels, trying to defend what we're doing. With all good intent. It's just misinterpreted at times.

" *I think that just basic information about how it works is important. We always have to assume that the citizenry is intelligent and there is nothing to be gained by trying to pull any kind of fast one or pull the wool over people's eyes or anything. Complete transparency is really important. And I think it's important that people be treated respectfully when they raise objections that are based on misunderstanding. It's very important to calmly and undefensively say, "no, this is how it works."*

" *Instead of spin, it's gotta be education on that stuff so that folks really understand it.*

Better communication will make this (MRA's use of TIF) feel tangible to the community. It will break down this jargony, technical side of this and turn it into the things the community cares about, thinks about, feels and wants to see.

But, say many, communication cannot replace doing the work that's necessary to improve issues with the MRA's use of TIF.

" *I'm not interested in a *%@!ing PR campaign to make the MRA look good. They have to roll up their goddamned sleeves and fix it.*

Specifically, interviewees want to see when a project was funded with TIF dollars. And they want to know the benefits for each project.

There are simple things, signs on buildings and projects. I'd like to put a little logo on everything that was a TIF project. So, you're just like, "Oh, okay. It wasn't just the Merc. It was that trail. And not this and not that." I want them to talk about why they do it. Projects with public benefit are the first thing they say, like, "we're doing this project and here's how it benefits the community." And if they can't come up with that really easily, maybe it's not a good project.

They want to see how projects relate to community-based plans versus being randomly approved for developers.

People need to see that clear connection between decisions and the plans they came from. Then they need to see that those plans came from the community. TIF projects are actually all based on what the community has said they want, but it's hard to see that right now.

People aren't really connecting the dots. They're not seeing that the community has voted for this. So, I think that's looking for ways to respond when people say, "Oh, you're just randomly giving money to developers.'"It should be on the website, here's what we've heard from the community. They want X, Y, and Z. Here's how this project works with X. I'm looking for those spaces and maybe it's just connecting the dots.

And they want basic information about how TIF works in a way that they can easily understand and how it ties to larger community goals.

I guess, just demystifying how it works…even when I looked up TIF information online, it's not exactly clear how it works for the developer. It tells you it can refund itself, which is great because that's probably the main thing that people want to push is that it's a way to put money back into this fund, but the way it works for developers is definitely confusing. I didn't know they have to do the work then get reimbursed. And I don't really know what areas of Missoula are TIF districts. That would be helpful to know.

[I want to see] This is what it is. This is how it works. This is the MRA process for accepting proposals and deciding on those proposals. One thing that we have wondered about is the underlying approach or philosophy of the MRA: how to balance the amount that's going to be reinvested, the monetary amount and investment that might, on the one hand benefit private companies, you can take Stockman bank as an example, it benefited that company, versus the public good. So how do they weigh that investment and how do they value the public good? So, I think those kinds of not only step 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, this is how the process works. But what is the goal and how are they achieving that?

Interviewees are also frustrated by the City's website.

> *And how many master's degrees does one need to be able to figure out what the budget is based on this website? Everyday people don't feel like they have access to this information. It's too hard to find.*

> *From the communications perspective, I think it's frustrating. I mean the website, it's just hard to find information and when you do, it's buried in an audit and somebody who's not like an accountant, can't understand it.*

> *They need to focus on a format that is much more approachable by the community. I often go there just to get minutes and I find it's gotten better, but it used to be even hard to find those. But I find nothing anywhere that tells me why do we have this program and how does it help us move forward? It's actually really powerful and compelling and totally aligns with who we are as a community. But it's not on the website.*

> *Our website as a City is completely utilitarian. It's not a communication tool, it's a transactional tool. There is certainly a place for that, and you need that. But MRA needs to communicate.*

Besides being easy to navigate, say interviewees, the site needs to be the place for people to get real information. It needs to solve the "transparency problem" and really explain the issues and give real data. One interviewee also points out that a commercial real estate company made some videos that are helpful and that it would be great if the MRA made some easy-to-understand videos as well.

And, say some, there needs to be a clear link to Engage Missoula for every project on the website:

> *I think upcoming projects and how to comment on them, assuming they're going to actually take comment and some sort of a public engagement portal or something that community organizing groups could send folks to.*

> *The Engage Missoula website for the West Broadway master plan was helpful to have. We were able to deliver flyers to neighbors and point them to the website to make comment. And we did this because we care about and are in relationship with neighbors who want their voices heard. So, it was nice to have that portal already set up to point people to. And just a general link to information about the projects—any move towards full transparency, I think will be helpful and get them less flack for what they're doing.*

Interviewees also want more case studies, a more proactive approach to the press, and a presence on social media.

> *Whether it's a business owner, who's trying to make the business happen, or the resident who needs the sidewalk, the way that people engage with knowledge today is not by reading the newspaper. And it's not by going to websites and surfing, it's things that are easy to share and easy to watch. And if we don't start like using those tools to getting information out, we're going to just leave behind a whole generation of future taxpayers. And they're never going to know what this is.*

Many also suggested that MRA needs a full-time marketing/communications person, or better yet, that the City create a full communications department.

They should have a dedicated communications person to explain City government, if that is the reason for their job, it's not to justify their work. It is to explain City government, because I'm thinking about the naysayers going, "how much are you spending for so-and-so on a dedicated position?" It's to help create public awareness around the work that they're doing. And it also has to be a channel, right? Like that communications person should be bringing back that public feedback then saying this is what people are talking about around TIF. Do we change? I think it would be a good investment.

As long as I've been around parking and TIF, it's always been hard to communicate and talk to people about. I think sometimes, homelessness and housing is kind of the same way. I think they're just sort of tough topics and I think one person cannot be expected to communicate all of the City's business. There should be more resources for communications and marketing at City Hall.

I think it should be taken out of the Mayor's office and I think it should be a department of its own. I think it should be responsible for parking and MRA as well as Public Works and Water and Housing and Innovation and Development Services. Development Services is another area where they don't communicate at all what they're doing. They could do a better job, but they can't do it with one person.

Our sister city in New Zealand has 17 staffers on their communications team. We have one who's designated as a communications director…who largely fulfills a traditional press secretary more than a communications role…and the communications specialists we have in other departments are, they're not doing communications…so, we're just woefully behind the curve by a long shot and lack the basic communication infrastructure of any professional organization and certainly one with 700 employees.

More than anything, interviewees want the MRA, and elected officials to listen.

What you're doing now (interviews), it seems that it could be effective in the long run. How do we address and answer folks' questions about TIF without being met with derogatory reactions.

Our system is very racist and classist and a lot of us progressives, especially in bureaucratic positions, don't really want to listen. Not really. And maybe they really want to listen, but they don't really want to give respect and credibility to what folks who are lower income, people of color, indigenous folks...there's a lot of expert elitism.

Currently, say interviewees, community engagement for the MRA happens at the beginning of a District and is usually done by consultants and engineers. Those that do this kind of engagement say it is difficult and that they are always trying to find new ways to reach people.

I know that public engagements very difficult, trying to figure out what kind of venue, etc. We're really leaning towards social media to get some really good messaging out and engage public in that. And we're going to update our website and have an interactive forum, to champion the TIF districts and the programs and the projects.

I've been involved with setting up some rural special improvement districts, and it really is boots on the ground, knocking on the door, ad hoc committees, and mass emails, social media posts, news media, radio, just really every venue I can think of to reach people and just public meetings and that kind of thing. There's not a silver bullet that I've been able to find yet. So, it's just like a little bit of everything. And even then, you know, you still don't quite hit the mark you'd like to.

When it's project specific, I'll go in and look at the Cadastral maps and then we'll start to build databases on what we can find in Cadastral. And then we'll start to put mailing lists together.

I start with community councils. I start to make a list of all the people that are engaged businesses, community council, boards, that kind of thing, and start with them and really engage people from the public sector and private sector.

I think the most important thing is to have a strategy, a plan, and then just kind of execute it instead of just, you know, doing short bursts of actions and no real long-term follow up plan, but it's real, real strategic with me.

But many interviewees say that this kind of engagement just isn't working and doesn't get real community engagement and input. The City, not just MRA, just doesn't have a good system for engaging citizens, they say. How can the City make it so that all citizens have the same level of access?

> This goes to a question I have about how the City engages citizens in general, which is a lot of meetings, right? There are public meetings. But how do I find out about when this meeting is happening? How do I get to it when it's at 1:00 PM on a Tuesday afternoon? I have a pretty flexible work schedule but a lot of people who might have opinions on these things don't. And how open is it to normal everyday citizens to approach this conversation versus maybe the investors or developers who already have that in, already speak that language…already know not only when is the public meeting but how do I talk to these people outside of that public meeting? I understand that the meetings are public, but to what extent are they actually accessible? It doesn't feel realistic to me as an individual.

There is a perception that MRA and the City feel like they are in tune with what the community wants and needs so there is no need to do deep community engagement.

> It's like they think, "we do all really cool, good progressive things maybe that are helpful," but a lot of it is that we've gotten to the point of like, "well, we just need to do this, and we'll deal with the repercussions of people being pissed off about it."

And that current engagement is perfunctory.

> A lot of people's past experience with community engagement and surveys is that it's just a token thing. And so, why take the time?
>
> Coming into community engagement, those things are very much at play because it's one thing to do community engagement and get people's information. It's a whole other thing to actually give them credibility and respect and have that actually have a defining, shaping voice in what happens.

When we say work with the community, who from the community? How many people from which communities? Is this just the Urban Renewal District? And how are people selected to be that voice for that community in that district?

"

For example, the West Broadway corridor development...they want to have a neighborhood engagement, but they just like plucked some person off of the neighborhood leadership team and said, "Oh, look, we checked the box, like there's a neighborhood person."

Current methods of engagement are also exclusionary say some interviewees.

"*They want to talk to Westside neighbors that have a bank-owned house or that have a business in the umbrella of concern of that development. So, Northside-Westside Crew had to insist on being part of that engagement process and take the reins a little bit from MRA and say, "Hey, we're going to take a laptop over to the Poverello Center. And we're going to have this survey that you're filling out available to residents of the Pov." They are residents, they are neighbors. They are folks that are affected by this development that's going to happen a stone's throw away from their home It's their home whether it's temporary for them or whether it's long term.*

During that charrette process, they were going to have an engagement in a park there by the end of the California Street bridge and [business that serves alcohol] They made the decision to pull that inside of Western Cider. And that's a business that's concerned first of all in the finish of the development. We had multiple neighbors that were invited to that park that are maybe they are parole restricted so they can't go into an alcohol-serving facility. Or they just don't want to go inside there for other reasons. So that person's comment is immediately eliminated by that decision. And by that kind of paying lip service to the idea of public comment, as opposed to actually seeking public comment. They seek the public comment within the parenthetical of the acceptable as opposed to seeking all public comment and discerning projects that best suit the scope of public comment.

And that the City, as well as the MRA, rely too heavily on the neighborhood councils, which, they say, are not even set up to be doing public engagement.

People at the City often point to the neighborhood councils as the main avenue for public engagement but limiting public engagement to neighborhood councils really limits public engagement overall. Grassroots organizing groups do have relationships with the neighborhood councils, but I feel like the neighborhood council provides an avenue for whoever wants to show up regularly to meet with electeds, which is cool for that handful of people. But those aren't the folks who are actually out door-knocking to engage and listen to a lot of neighbors. That's more community organizing groups like CREW and F2F [Franklin to Fort]. These groups are actually out knocking doors and getting people information and things like that. Public engagement just shouldn't be limited to a rep from neighborhood councils. I think there's definitely a need to engage with both kinds of groups, the neighborhood council and the community organizing groups in town.

Still, some developers say that they do hear what people don't like but can't get a clear answer on what people do want.

Basically the architects and the engineers are used to hosting these public meetings. They have their format of how they do it with their design charettes. And I have heard from the community "we don't want no dang design charettes." But ,when I've asked the question of what is it you want so I could try to give it to you, no one has that answer for me. So, I'm happy to do the thing that gets the most public involvement and surfaces up what the true demands of the community are.

And others point out the difficulties of having to juggle various community interests and desires with the realities of building and paying for projects.

"I think that the public is frustrated because they get presented with, design A or design B, which would you like? And the answer sometimes is neither. We don't like either one of those. It's really, really, really challenging to work with a broad-based coalition of communities that want you to solve their social problems through your building of the houses and, in particular, a big project where people are like, well, there could be opportunity for community ownership or there could be opportunity for this. And, you know, if there's an entrepreneur that wants to come run the childcare center or the grocery store or the coffee shop, an entrepreneur, one person who's responsible who will pay the lease, and we can look them in the eye and go, "let's look at your business plan. Let's make sure those works okay."

And some developers also say that too much public engagement actually delays the process. In a situation where time equals money, they say, that can actually cause costs to rise and those costs get passed on to buyers and renters, which, they say, is counterproductive.

"That is the benefit of being on the same page," say community activists. "If a lot of community members feel that they're generally on the same page about community needs, then maybe that would make the public process go a little quicker," but, they point out, "at the same time too, if the MRA values engaging a lot of folks, then I'm sorry, but you have to take the time do that. If that's one of your values, then you'll make time for it. I would hope. But I do think being in relationship with folks means we're on the same page about understanding our needs. So that might help a little bit with moving the public engagement process along. And that's something that community organizing groups are really good at."

And, they add, this is an example of a problem that the City can address by prioritizing and building capacity for engagement so that it comes at the beginning of the process and not the end.

And start earlier. A lot of the onus of this is on the City also because they're going to be enforcing, should be enforcing, what the public good is. But Franklin to the Fort, again, right north of MRL park, we know that somebody is planning what's going to happen with that area. And that's even before developers get specifically involved. The City bought that location. That would have been the time to start the community engagement process. Not when you're 90% down the path and the developers are ready to build and then using this "well, you're going to delay our building. The costs are going to go up." Well, where did the budget even come from that you started on this process? If we knew that at the 10% mark, when the City purchased the property and then they started engaging the community about what do you want, then that's not really a valid excuse anymore. We're too far down the timeline. And I would put that onus on the City, over the private company, it's not in the private company's interest. I don't believe that private companies are going to, to act out of the kindness of the public good, especially without a profit margin, but that is why we have City officials. And that is why we pay taxes towards common assets.

Still, some say, there are good examples of collaboration between developers, the City/MRA and the community. Organizers point to the Ravara development as the beginning of a successful engagement model.

> "The Ravara development that is hopefully going to happen on Scott Street is a model for how organizing groups can work with developers and public engagement. We're hoping to demonstrate what it could look like for engagement with the City, to the benefit of both neighbors and developers. For example, CREW is co-creating the whole public process with the developer at Ravara—we're co-creating the survey that's going to go out to neighbors, which is good because these folks from out of town initially made the draft of the survey and there are questions that wouldn't have made sense to people, like "Which neighborhood do you live in on the Northside?" Stuff like that. That's not something that someone living in Missoula would say. And so, even just co-creating a survey at the beginning has felt more empowering…just being a part of the process from the beginning. And then…always looking for more ways to engage more people."

For a more comprehensive analysis of community organizing and engagement in Missoula please see the section,